

Implementation of a New Curriculum for the English Teacher Program at the National University of Education in Mongolia

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on evaluating current practices of implementation of English teacher program applying new curriculum packages “Teacher, Foreign Language Education” at Mongolian National University of Education. In addition, the study intended to identify the impacts of a credit system based on student choices. The students were asked their opinions on program choices, course textbooks, independent works, assessments, teachers’ advising hours, teaching methodologies, and student surveys to determine satisfaction. According to the study, this new curriculum packages have provided many possibilities for choosing the duration of study, class schedules, the teachers and subjects for students. The curriculum packages have been implemented for only one year, and the results of the study indicate that the design and implementation of the new curriculum packages have been successful so far and is on the right track. However, further comprehensive and detailed research will need to be done in all areas of the curriculum packages.

Keyword: Higher education quality reform, teacher education, credit system, new curriculum packages

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy documents

The Government of Mongolia has aims of developing a strong educational sector in Mongolia and raising the level of the national educational system to an international level, by providing quality education and producing highly competent and creative teachers. As a result, the Government of Mongolia has developed a number of policy documents, which include The Education Master Plan for 2006-2015, The Science and Technology Master Plan of Mongolia for 2007–2020, The State Education Policy for 2014-2024, the National Developmental Policy of Mongolia for 2007-2021, the “National Education Program” for 2012-2021 and the “Educated Mongolian National Program” for 2012-2016.

By drawing attention to higher education, the Ministry of Education and Science of

Mongolia developed the policy on Higher Education Quality Reform for 2012-2016. The Government for Reform is adhering to this policy by creating opportunities and conditions to prepare patriotic Mongolian citizens for teaching. The goal is to prepare teachers who respect the values of a civic and democratic society and who have acquired creative and competitive skills, by improving their quality of research and by intensifying their motivation to do research. According to this document, it is essential to develop standards for teacher training institutions, to improve the quality of training and learning. In the framework of this reform, the Ministry of Education and Science of Mongolia approved this national program to support teacher development.

Mongolian National University of Education (MNUE), which is a national teacher training institution in Mongolia, aims to transform into a training-research university and become a competitive institution among many Asian universities of education. It is worth noting that the University has formulated its developmental policy for 2014-2024. It has developed comprehensive programs to improve the quality of admissions and has revitalized curricula with new standards, content, methodology and technology for each course. It has also set up an "Evaluation Center" to measure the impact of curriculum, create an evaluation system, develop e-resources for the courses, offer transformative, correspondent, semi-distant programs for students, and accredit all curricula at national and international levels. As a result, we began working with this new management system, including new methods and mechanisms to improve the quality of education. This resulted in making reforms to teacher education and supporting the continuing education of professional teachers.

The Mongolia National University of Education has five schools, one of which is the School of Social Sciences and Humanities. In this School, the Foreign Language Faculty comprises four departments in Western and Asian Languages. The teachers of The Foreign Language Faculty have designed the new curriculum packages, "Teacher, Foreign Language Education" which includes six language teacher programs in English, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese and Korean.

One of the departments is the English, German Language Department which was established in 1993. In 2014, the Department developed the part for English teacher program of the new curriculum packages. The Department has its history and accumulated experience in curriculum development. It is one of the biggest departments with 18 capable and resourceful teachers. In the last 20 years, the number of graduates in this Department has reached over 1700 people. In terms of graduates, 125 students obtained their bachelor's degrees, majoring in English teaching and translating, whereas 384 students earned bachelor's degrees majoring in English teaching. Besides the undergraduate program, this Department is also in charge of professional courses for graduate programs, in-service teacher training for secondary school teachers, and

transformative training for non-English teachers. The bachelor's degree program on English teaching offered by the Department was accredited in 2013 by meeting the established requirements and criteria for higher education program accreditation of Mongolia.

1.2 The rationale of the curriculum packages for "Teacher, Foreign Language Education"

The need to develop the new curriculum packages for "Teacher, Foreign Language Education" was due to the higher education quality reform, the teacher education quality reform, the structural changes of MNUE and the conversion to a credit system. Educational program objectives are to prepare teachers who have acquired basic knowledge and skills needed for organizing the training that is suitable for differentiated learners. This preparation will also enable the teachers to use their acquired knowledge and ability through practice, and to motivate their willingness to continuously develop their professionalism and that of their students. In the near future, the curriculum packages will be the main foundation for carrying out master's and doctoral programs. The curriculum packages formulate the framework of knowledge, ability and attitude to be acquired by students through teacher education programs. This framework is comprised of four factors below, which are subdivided further:

1. The values and belief of educators
2. Individual basic knowledge, ability and attitude
3. Teacher education knowledge, professional skill and attitude
4. Academic knowledge, ability and attitude

The curriculum packages inform about syllabus plans that indicate types of subjects and credit hours as in the table below.

Table 1

Credit Distribution of Syllabus Plan

Subject types		Compulsory subjects		Elective subjects		Total subjects	
		Credit	Percent	Credit	Percent	Credit	Percent
General basic / not over 20%		17	14.1%	4	3.25%	21	17.5%
Professional basic / not over 30%		35	29.2%	4	3.25%	39	32.5%
Professional subjects/ not less than	Package courses	5	4.1%	4	3.25%	9	7.5%
	Professional subjects	45	39.0%	4	3.25%	49	40.8%

50%	Graduation preparation subjects / Diploma work	2	1.6%			2	1.7%
Total mark 120< total credit to be collected for instruction<130		104	87%	16	13%	120	100%

Students majoring in the English teacher program are required to complete 120 credit hours for the undergraduate degree, while those majoring in Russian-English teacher, English-German teacher, and English-Chinese teacher programs are expected to earn 40 more credits. During the academic year of 2014-2015, the curriculum packages were chosen by 400 students, 206 of whom were selected for a Bachelor's degree program on English teacher according to the specific criteria.

According to the study, it is challenging for students to become successful students at the University since they have many requirements to complete. They are required to choose their teachers, make class schedules on their own, get advice from teachers, perform independent works and creative tasks, evaluate their teachers in terms of teaching methodologies and professionalism, all while getting adjusted to new learning environments and conditions. Our study aimed to evaluate current practices of implementation of English teacher program of MNUE, referring to the new curriculum packages. In addition, it intended to identify the impact of a choice-based credit system for students, by determining their opinions on numerous program areas. These included course textbooks, independent works, assessments, teachers' advising hours, teaching methodologies and student surveys to ascertain their satisfaction. We then made recommendations based on our study findings to improve the curriculum packages for "Teacher, Foreign Language Education."

1.3 Study methodology

In the study, we used qualitative study methods, including surveys, interviews, and data analysis. The survey was used to collect reliable information from students. We used open questions and offered respondents multiple-choice questions from which to choose the statements that most nearly described their response to an item. We also ensured that questions were clear and that we had reliable ways of collecting and managing the data.

1.4 Target group of the study

In total, 106 students who enrolled in II course level of the English teacher program at our university in the 2015-2016 academic year were involved in this study. Out of 106

students, 98 were females, while only 7 were male students. Regarding the age differences, 99 students were between 17-20 years old whereas 5 students were 21-24 years old. Of the total participants, 15 students got scores of 650-750, and 78 of them scored from 550-649 in the entrance general examination. Only 6 students received scores below 550. In terms of receiving scholarships, one student received 100% scholarship, 6 students received scholarship to cover 70% of the costs of their education, and 6 students studied under the scholarship program of other organizations that supported education. The remaining 80 students were self-financed.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1 The choice of “English Teacher Program” in the curriculum packages “Teacher, Foreign Language Education”

Totally, about 400 students entered the Foreign Language Faculty of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, MNUE in the 2014-2015 academic year. About 200 students out of all students were able to be involved in the English Teacher Program on the basis of meeting the fixed requirements. In total, 106 students took part in the study, and 77% of students confirmed that English teachers are in more demand than other language teachers and that there were more jobs to be found for English teachers. 23% said that they chose the program because it is possible for them to transform into other jobs.

It is shown that students are interested in choosing the job because the jobs of English teachers are found more compared to other language teachers (Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and German teachers). A few students chose the program with the aim of transforming into other jobs using their newly acquired English language education. Currently, students are admitted into this program based on their scores of the entrance general examination and GPA taken in 1st semester. In this study, students were asked to prioritize the factors that are influential for choosing the program. They answered as follows:

Table 3

Factors for Choosing the English Teacher Program

	Factors	Percent	Places
1	Score of entrance general examinations	32%	I
2	English language placement test	28%	II
3	Statement essay	25%	III
4	Interview	16%	IV
5	GPA of 1 st semester	9%	V

The study shows the students agreed the score of the general entrance examination was a main factor to be considered in the program, but they didn't give much importance to consideration of the GPA of 1st semester. During the 1st semester, students only study general, basic subjects and do not study professional English subjects, so this finding correlates to this fact.

It is necessary to introduce methods that make reliable evaluation of the potential and attitudes of students. These include an English language placement test, a statement essay and an interview to admit students into the program. Furthermore, the management staff in the curriculum sector in the School needs to discuss the opinions suggested by students relating to program choices as they reflect on these findings.

2.2 Teacher Choices

Course level I-II students of the school have the opportunity to choose their teachers in connection with the implementation of this new curriculum packages and the transfer to the credit system. The issue of what factors the students use to make this choice attracted our attention. We found 43.3% of the study participants chose their teachers by considering their class schedules. 23% of students made their choices of teachers by recommendations from their student and non-student friends. About 21.2% of the students said that they didn't consider any factors to make a choice, and 12.5% received suggestions from senior students and teachers they know.

The study demonstrated that students should be informed with valid, reliable information on teachers who will be teaching these subjects. In particular, they need to be provided with information about the teachers' experiences and achievements related to their education and training in open, transparent and accessible ways. In other words, students need to be supported and guided by the school to make reasonable choices of their teachers.

2.3 Advising Hours of Teachers

We found that 22% of the study participants were aware of the advising hours, they received advice, and said the advising hours were useful for them. About 27% of the students said that they knew about the advising hours but they did not get any advice or guidance. Surprisingly, 41% of the students said that they did not know about the advising hours at all.

The study shows that the curriculum sector and the teachers involved need to be motivated and active in order to inform and involve more students in their advising hours. Currently, all teachers are required to provide guidance to students based on their schedules once a week. In reality, the advising hours are fixed in the early morning or late afternoon because all classrooms are occupied during the day times. Furthermore, it

is a necessity to reduce the instructional workload of teachers, increase the availability of classrooms and thereby increase the teachers' advising hours. In addition, all students need to participate in the advising sessions and most importantly, students who are struggling academically need to have priority for receiving this advising time with the teachers.

2.4 The textbooks on the subjects of “Speaking and Writing Skill Development” and “Grammar in Use”

The student participants were asked about the textbooks on the subjects of “Speaking and writing skill development” and “Grammar in use.” As for the textbook of “Speaking and writing skill development,” 39% of all the students in the study said that the textbook had good content and was appropriate to their language levels. About 47% of all the students said that the textbook had too many exercises, and they had fewer opportunities to practice their speaking skills. An additional 14% of the students noted that they had already studied the textbook in the secondary school and wanted to study another new textbook in this subject.

The study showed that some students who studied the same textbook again at the university as the one they studied at the secondary school had less motivation. This factor may deter the students from improving their language skills. Thus, teachers need to choose textbooks written with new content and methodology that is appropriate to the university level.

As for the textbook “Grammar in use,” we found 38% of all students said that the textbook has good content and was appropriate to their language levels. Approximately 44% answered that the textbook had too much content and too many grammar exercises. Because of these disadvantages, they were not able to develop their language skills as easily, and they had less opportunities to apply the grammar when speaking and writing in English. An additional 18% of the students noted that they studied the textbook in the secondary school and wanted to study another new textbook in the course.

In this curriculum, the name of the course was “English Grammar” but it changed to “Grammar in Use.” Although the name was changed to emphasize the application of grammar, the students' answers in our study revealed that the subject did not prove to have good results for them. It was suggested that teachers should take more initiative to use new methodologies to focus on the application of grammar rather than focusing on grammar forms. Having only 1-2 textbooks to use for these subjects is limiting because the course curriculum is developed on the basis of the textbooks' content.

2.5 Independent Work

Over half of the 106 participants (58 students) answered that they wrote short texts as

their independent work, while 56 students said that they read books in English. In addition, 16 students made English presentations on the PowerPoint software program, while 48 students said they did textbook exercises. Most students completed textbook exercises as their independent study, but half of them reported that this kind of training was not effective to improve their language skills. It was shown that this kind of independent study is not effective because it only evaluates the quantity of exercises completed rather than developing the skills needed to master English.

The study revealed that students had less trouble in performing their independent work on the course of “Speaking and writing skill development.” For instance, over half of the study participants, 57 students, said that their independent work was difficult to do. 34 students said that the time needed to complete it was too short, while 39 students said that it was too difficult to do individually. The results showed that 25 students did not get any guidance from their teachers concerning their independent work.

It was suggested that teachers need to assign independent works by first considering the appropriate language levels of students. The teachers also need to listen to the students’ ideas on their choices and assign realistic deadlines for this independent study.

The study revealed that there was not enough choice for types of independent works, other than reading books in English and writing short texts. The teachers need to give students more creative choices for independent works that motivates the students to analyze, explore and process information to facilitate learning English.

2.6 Assessing Knowledge and Skills of Students

Our study found 60% of the total students in the study answered that all teachers advised the students how they would assess the students in English subjects, while 40% of the students said that some teachers explained the guidelines of assessing students at the beginning of their course. It is praiseworthy that most teachers informed the students about their types of assessment early in the course.

However, 67% of students answered that the teachers’ assessment criteria and indicators for success in the class were not clearly described. In reality, although teachers in the department described assessment criteria and indicators for success in their course curricula, they did not fully implement them in their instructions. 41% of the students answered that the teachers’ assessments of students were not reliable, valid and authentic. This finding is related to the fact that teachers do not follow the criteria and indicators described in detail in their course curricula.

2.7 Teaching Skills of Teachers

About 22% of the students stated that the teaching skills of their teachers are ‘excellent,’ while 52% of the students evaluated their teaching skills as ‘good’ and 26% evaluated

them to be ‘average.’ The study demonstrates that the creative teaching methods of the teachers are positively received by the students and, therefore, may have more impact on the students.

Even though most students evaluated the teaching skills of their teachers as ‘excellent’ and ‘good,’ one fourth of the teachers only got an ‘average’ evaluation from their students. In this case, these teachers need to introduce more creative teaching methods and improve their teaching skills.

2.8 Student Satisfaction Surveys

A total of 67% of the students stated in our study that they had to evaluate their teachers when they were in the secondary schools. This shows that they have some experiences in evaluating their teachers. Approximately 73% of the students believed that it is appropriate to evaluate their university teachers by using the student satisfaction survey. However, 27% of the students said that they were afraid of participating in the survey because they thought the teachers knew the answers anyway. About 65% of students replied that they were confident they could make reliable and fair assessments of their teachers, while 46% of students answered that they didn’t understand some of the questions of the survey. This study revealed that it is necessary to add more questions and make the questions more precise and understandable in the satisfaction survey.

3. Conclusion

The new curriculum packages have been designed and implemented in accordance with international trends and related policies of the country in the framework of quality reform in education, higher education and teacher education. Specifically, the curriculum attempts to follow the principles of a credit system and free choices for the students. This new curriculum has provided many possibilities for choosing the duration of study, individual class schedules, and a variety of teachers and subjects for students in the Foreign Language faculty. The curriculum has been implemented for only one year. In this case, it is too early to make a complete evaluation on the curriculum. However, it can be stated that the design modifications and implementation of the new curriculum have been successful so far and it is on the right track. This achievement is the result of the many contributions made by professors and educators from the School and the Department.

The findings in the study show that the number of students who want to be admitted to the English teacher program tends to increase each year. This tendency for growth is related to the needs for jobs of English language teachers. The findings revealed that the entrance to the program has been challenging for both students and teachers in the program. As students in this study and some teachers of the program have proposed, new reliable and

authentic assessment methods (English language placement tests, a statement essay and an interview) should be applied to select the students for the program by considering the potential and attitudes of these students. The findings from the study show that some students are not well prepared to make correct choices for teachers. It is suggested that the school and department help guide students to make reasonable choices of their teachers on the basis of open, transparent and accessible online data on the teachers' experiences and achievements related to their education and training.

Moreover, it is revealed that the advising hours for students have not been effective for most students in the study. To improve the program's effectiveness, it is imperative to reduce the instructional workload of teachers, increase the availability of classrooms and advising hours, and provide more guidance to all students, especially those who are struggling academically. In addition, the choice and application of several new up-to-date textbooks in the curriculum design can show significant support to the quality of teaching many English subjects. To overcome many problems faced by these students regarding independent work, it is recommended that the teachers listen to the students' ideas and choices, as well as assign realistic deadlines for the completion of their independent work. The teachers must give students more creative choices to engage in independent work that motivates the students and facilitates their learning of English. As for the assessment of students, teachers need to present and follow detailed criteria and indicators that are already described in the course curricula to make reliable, valid and fair assessments of students. The study demonstrates that adding more precise and understandable questions in the satisfaction survey can make the assessment of their teachers more reliable and fair.

Professors of education of other language teachers, who are implementing new curriculum packages, should carry out these recommendations in the study described in this paper to improve the implementation in their own programs. Furthermore, other studies need to be done to obtain better results in numerous areas for educating foreign language teachers and other programs in the faculty.

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