

2015

Overworked and stressed teachers under market economy: Case Study in Northwest China

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Overworked and stressed teachers under market economy: Case Study in Northwest China

Abstract

This chapter is based on a case study conducted in Xisheng (pseudonym promised to the participants for anonymity purposes) in Northwest China to explore teachers' perspectives on teaching under the market economy system. The original plan was to study local indigenous teachers, but that was not possible due to political sensitivity of the region at the time of data collection. As a result, we interviewed mostly Han teachers, including as many local indigenous teachers as possible. We think that the study is still useful as it was the first study of its kind and that it was informative regarding the impact of the market economy on teachers in northwestern China. Some findings of the study were discussed in Beckett (2012) and Guo et al. (2013). In this chapter, we refer to that work and discuss additional data that were not discussed in those publications. The remainder of the chapter discusses ideological and sociocultural contexts and research methods of the study followed by findings and discussions. We conclude with limitations and implications of the study.

Disciplines

Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Curriculum and Instruction | Curriculum and Social Inquiry | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research

Comments

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GULBAHAR BECKETT AND JUANJUAN ZHAO

9. OVERWORKED AND STRESSED TEACHERS UNDER THE MARKET ECONOMY

Case Study in Northwest China

BACKGROUND

This chapter is based on a case study conducted in *Xisheng* (pseudonym promised to the participants for anonymity purposes) in Northwest China to explore teachers' perspectives on teaching under the market economy system. The original plan was to study local indigenous teachers, but that was not possible due to political sensitivity of the region at the time of data collection. As a result, we interviewed mostly Han teachers, including as many local indigenous teachers as possible. We think that the study is still useful as it was the first study of its kind and that it was informative regarding the impact of the market economy on teachers in northwestern China. Some findings of the study were discussed in Beckett (2012) and Guo et al. (2013). In this chapter, we refer to that work and discuss additional data that were not discussed in those publications. The remainder of the chapter discusses ideological and sociocultural contexts and research methods of the study followed by findings and discussions. We conclude with limitations and implications of the study.

IDEOLOGICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS

Neoliberal Market Economy

During the past three decades, the People's Republic of China (P. R. C.) underwent numerous changes and reforms guided by neoliberal market economy globalization ideology (Beckett, 2012) that impacted all walks of life, including ways of being and ways of doing. Market economy system made it possible for unprecedented number of families to become financially richer enabling them and their children to have access to resources that were inaccessible to many. Globalization pushed the country as a whole to reorient its pedagogical policies and practices to prepare its citizens to compete globally evidenced by the introduction of student-centered teaching/learning practices in general, English education to earlier grades, and *Hanyu* medium instruction approach in minority areas (Beckett, 2012).

As discussed in Beckett (2012), market economy system, guided by a neoliberal ideology, promotes intense competition for global resources reducing the world

to a market place that pursues the most gain for least investment. Some argue that neoliberalism is a class project that creates “ever increasing inequalities between and within states” (Peters, 2011, p. 190; also see Lipman, 2012) by promoting a one nation, one language, and one culture rhetoric in which “all individuals, freed from their ethnic origins, ... their traditional cultural beliefs, can participate in a modern democratic society” (Peters, 2011, p. 38). As such, it is antagonist to diversity and “sustainability interests of indigenous languages and cultures” (MacPherson, 2012, p. 193). It systematically excludes groups historically defined as Other (Peters, 2011). The current *Hanyu* (official national language also known as *Putonghua*) medium instruction policy which various governments refer to as “bilingual” education for indigenous students to enforce homogeneity is one example of P. R. C.’s neoliberal agenda because it allows for stratification of languages by assigning economic value to them (Beckett & MacPherson, 2005; MacPherson, 2012), rendering non-*Han* languages less valuable because they are spoken by relatively fewer people. It also helps justify the displacement of indigenous and minority languages as medium of instruction with increasingly intense push for replacing them with that of *Hanyu* under the rhetoric of homogenous society (Beckett, 2012; Beckett & Postiglione, 2010, 2012).

Sociocultural Contexts

Teaching and teachers in China enjoyed centuries of respect and honour except during the cultural revolution during part of the 1960s and 1970s (Guo & Guo, 2012). P. R. C.’s market economy has benefited many as evidenced by the fact that the country now has the world’s second largest economy (Guo et al., 2013) which allowed it to successfully launch a space mission and created a sizable middle class. Unprecedented Chinese citizens now have the economic power that affords their children and themselves various resources such as multimedia learning tools and access to the Internet. However, there is little research on how market economy may have impacted teachers, especially those who work in the Northwestern P. R. C.

Available research indicates that market economy reform brought about significant changes in education reflected in curricula reform as well as living and working conditions of urban and rural teachers. They show rural and urban disparities, marginalization of minority languages in education, inadequacy of accessible and affordable education for the children of migrant workers (Guo et al., 2013). For example, S. Guo (2012) case study of 21 migrant teachers in southern P. R. C. revealed that economic miracle resulted from the market economy did not improve the living and working conditions of migrant teachers. In fact, migrant teachers’ welfare deteriorated as they were insufficiently paid, lived in poor housing conditions, and overworked. They were forced to pick up additional work such as after school tutoring to make ends meet. Guo concluded that market economy created social injustice and inequality in P. R. C. An investigation of the working and living conditions of urban and rural school teachers under market economy by Li (2012) in central P. R. C. found urban rural inequality from her analysis of data

collected from 18 teachers selected from seven schools, reflected in teachers' salary, pensions, workload as well as their living and working conditions. Furthermore, even the seemingly increased living standards of the urban teachers did not translate into improved well-being due to the increasing disparity between teachers' salaries and the cost of housing as well as job insecurity and dissatisfaction because of decreased rights and exclusion in decision making. These findings echo that of Y. Guo's (2012) interview study of 24 English teachers in eastern P. R. C. which revealed the impact of market economy in the form of linguistic instrumentalism on English education and English teachers' wellbeing. Findings of that study also showed that despite salary increase, inflation left the teachers still living in poor conditions. Commodification of education created service provider and client relationship between teachers and students' parent where the fee-paying parents demand service for their money.

Market economy reform in P. R. C. has significantly impacted the country's 113 million members of indigenous and minority populations socioeconomically, socio-politically, and sociolinguistically (Becket & Postiglione, 2010, 2012) with implications for teachers and their welfare (Beckett, 2012). Studies show market economy system contributes to high turnover rate among teachers who leave their teaching position for more lucrative jobs (Chang & Lv, 2006), leaving some rural schools with almost no teachers with postsecondary education and higher (Pan, 2009). Despite economic progress, poor working conditions, heavy workload, and work-related stress also contribute to a high teacher turnover rate among minority teaches (Chang & Lv, 2006; Zhou, 2012). According to Beckett (2012) and Ma (2009) research on indigenous teachers in northwestern P. R. C., teachers were also stressed due to the language in education reform that made *Hanyu* as the language of instruction for all students under the economic opportunity rhetoric. This was stressful for teachers because they believed that the policy was put in place without sufficient support, leaving indigenous teachers and students having to teach and learn in a language in which they did not have sufficient proficiency to engage in grade appropriate knowledge transmission and acquisition. Teachers were further stressed about the financial and time demand required for professional development necessary to keep up with the reform.

It is clear from the above discussion that while the market economy reform in the P. R. C. benefited the country's economy as well as students and their parents, its benefit for teachers suggests frustrations and stress. This chapter extends the discussions with additional findings that elaborate some of the frustrations and stress and shed some light on how neoliberalism transpires in Northwestern P. R. C. under the banner of market economy reform, particularly in relation to teaching and teachers' wellbeing.

METHOD OF INQUIRY

Research Site

The site for the study was a Northwestern P. R. C. province of *Xisheng* (pseudonym promised to the participants for anonymity purpose) inhabited by 47 ethnic groups,

but 60.7 percent of the population comprising of 13 major ethnic communities. The participants were 22 teachers from four schools (labeled as schools A, B, C, and D in this chapter) from *Xishi* (pseudonym, also promised to the participants for anonymity purposes) with a population of 2.08 million, about 27.3 percent of whom were Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Huis, Mongols, and other smaller ethnic population. The rest of the population of *Xishi* was that of *Han* ethnicity.

School A was a high profile school with a history of nearly a century. 27 percent of its 190 teachers held or were pursuing graduate degrees. 745 out of its 3,785 student population were middle school students (Grades 7-9). The rest of them were high school students. School B was ethnically mixed school (*minhan hexiao*) where *Han* and non-*Han* students and with over 50 years of history. Ten years ago, teachers at School B were divided into Native/indigenous language and *Hanyu* departments based on their teachers' and students' first languages. *Hanyu* department was composed of 87 teachers and the rest of the 202 teachers were in the Native/indigenous (Uyghur) language department. The school had 1818 students in total, with 21 middle school classes in *Hanyu* language department and 19 middle and high school classes in the native/indigenous Uyghur language department. School C, a subordinate unit of the provincial government, was an experimental school with over 60 years of history. The school was equipped with modern educational technology, known for its multimedia classrooms and known as one of the best middle schools in the province. 18 out of its 305 teachers held graduate degrees; 13 were research fellows either at provincial or municipal levels; ten were national core teachers (who played lead roles in the new curriculum training), and five were members of the provincial education reform committee. Student population ranged from kindergarten to high school totalling about 5,600, more than 3,000 of whom were high school students. School D, affiliated with an agricultural university, had 60 years of history. It had 152 teachers and 2,395 students. 1,023 of those students were in its high school division and 1,372 of them were in the middle school division.

Participants

Participants of the study were 22 (9 males and 13 females) junior and senior high school teachers recruited by a *Han* research assistant from the four schools described above. Four of the teachers were in an age range of 26–30, eight were in 31–40 range, four were in the 41–50 range, and six were in the 51–55 age range. The original plan for the study was to recruit predominantly local indigenous teachers from rural areas, but due to political sensitivities in the region, that plan did not materialize. As a result, 16 teachers of *Han* ethnicity, four teachers of Uyghur ethnicity, one teacher of Kazakh ethnicity, and one teacher of Tujia ethnicity volunteered to participate in the study. Even though the data came from participants mostly of *Han* ethnicity, we believe the findings of the study are still valuable as they are representative of working and living conditions some teachers in similar contexts.

OVERWORKED AND STRESSED TEACHERS UNDER THE MARKET ECONOMY

The participants' monthly income ranged from 500 to 6,000 *yuan* (\$78 to \$938 CAD), with one participant reporting income between 1,001–2,000 *yuan* (\$156 to \$312 CAD), 12 participants reporting income between 2,001–3,000 *yuan* (\$312 to \$469 CAD), six participants reporting income between 3,000–4,000 *yuan* (\$469 to \$625 CAD), and one participant reporting income between 5,001–6,000 *yuan* (\$781 to \$938 CAD). Twenty-one of the 22 participants were full-time teachers with years of service ranging from 5 to 32 years. Table 1 summarizes some basic demographic information graphically. Note that T stands for teachers and that each participant is numbered in the order they were interviewed for reporting convenience.

Table 1. Participant demographic information (modified from Beckett, 2012)

Participant	Gender*	Ethnicity	Language	Age Range	Years of Services	Monthly Income
T1	F	Han	Hanyu	36–40	13	2001–3000
T2	M	Han	Hanyu	36–40	20	3001–4000
T3	F	Uyghur	Uyghur	31–35	10	2001–3000
T4	F	Han	Hanyu	41–45	24	3001–4000
T5	M	Han	Hanyu	51–55	30	3001–4000
T6	F	Uyghur	Hanyu	41–45	25	2001–3000
T7	F	Uyghur	H & U**	36–40	N/A***	1001–2000
T8	F	Han	Hanyu	31–35	12	2001–3000
T9	M	Han	Hanyu	31–35	8	2001–3000
T10	M	Han	Hanyu	46–50	24	2001–3000
T11	M	Han	Hanyu	51–55	30	Under 500
T12	F	Uyghur	Uyghur	31–35	11	2001–3000
T13	F	Han	Hanyu	26–30	8	2001–3000
T14	F	Han	Hanyu	46–50	24	2001–3000
T15	M	Kazakh	Kazakh	26–30	5	3001–4000
T16	M	Tujia	Hanyu	26–30	6	2001–3000
T17	F	Han	Hanyu	26–30	6	3001–4000
T18	F	Han	Hanyu	31–35	11	2001–3000
T19	M	Han	Hanyu	51–55	32	5001–6000
T20	M	Han	Hanyu	51–55	32	3001–4000
T21	F	Hui	Hanyu	51–55	30	2001–3000
T22	F	Han	Hanyu	51–55	30	N/A***

Note: Gender*: M = Male, F = Female M & U**: H = Hanyu, U = Uyghur
N/A***: Not Available

Data Sources and Analysis

Data sources included a demographic survey, in-depth interviews in *Hanyu* by a *Han* research assistant, and document analysis by another *Han* research assistant and by the authors. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed by two *Han* research assistants in Chinese and translated and analyzed by the authors. The demographic survey data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics. The transcriptions of the interview data were analyzed for categories and reorganized logically for salient themes and sub-themes constantly comparing to the research purpose and foci (Spradley, 1980). This inductive analysis approach allowed us to construct meaning from data for “making sense of the social phenomenon” we are studying (Hatch, 2002, p.180). The prominent themes emerged from the analysis are presented and discussed in the next section of the chapter.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Unequally Beneficial and Dogmatic

As discussed in Beckett (2012) and Guo et al. (2013), all 22 teachers participated in the study unanimously agreed that market economy reform benefited their work environment evidenced by increasing investment by various levels of governments, ministry of education, and school districts in new teaching resources, modern and strongly build libraries, painted sports grounds, and automatic school gates. Market economy system also enabled schools to raise additional funds from increased student enrollment and through company sponsorship. Teachers found the specific resources such as computer equipment, over-head projectors, and internet installment in teachers’ offices and classrooms benefited their lesson plans as they made resource searching and finding more efficient and effective. They made it possible for the teachers to bring PowerPoint slides and other media integrated lesson plans to class. Additionally, teachers elaborated that availability of multimedia was useful for demonstration of dangerous experiments and abstract concepts to help students understand concrete examples as well as for vivid presentation of historical events. Some schools made use of the technology resources to set up their own websites for intraschool as well as interschool resource sharing.

However, teachers were thoughtful and selective about technology utilization. According to them, older teachers (e.g., age of 40, 50) used less multimedia because it took them longer to adjust to the modern technology and they were concerned about its potentially negative impact on students’ learning. For example, they worried about the possibility of uncontrolled and possibly negative internet information that could distract students from learning school subjects in general and Chinese characters (orthography) in particular. Many teachers emphasized that multimedia should be seen as a teaching tool whose purpose is to improve teaching quality and effectiveness, but the use of technology should be thoughtful and context

dependent. Math teachers in particular believed that using chalkboard demonstration of mathematical problem solving processes is more effective than PPT slide demonstration and therefore the use of the latter should be limited in math classes.

While teachers thought their schools could benefit from the market economy system more, they were concerned that resource allocation among urban and remote suburban schools was unequal. They said that schools like theirs in *Xishi* were much better resourced with teachers and teaching equipment than suburban and rural schools that actually needed resources more to improve education. The participants were critical of budget allocation that seemed dogmatic and careless, inconsiderate of local needs, and wasteful. The following interview excerpt with Teacher 5 represents such sentiment:

Some of the investments appear dogmatic and careless rather than thoughtfully geared toward local reality and needs. For example, our campus has room for only one set of football (soccer) frame, but we were given two sets based on the numbers of students we have. Since we don't have room for two sets, the extra set could have been given to a school that has bigger campus. Alternatively, the extra funding could have been invested in getting us a regular-sized football field that we need, but don't have.

The above findings indicate that market economy benefited the participants and their schools through government and company investments, which helped improve physical environment of schools and helped improve teaching with the help of technology tools (see Beckett, 2012 for more details). However, they also suggest disparity in resource sharing among schools in *Xishi* and *Xisheng* where investments were possibly made dogmatically without sufficient contextual feasibility and needs assessment study. Such dogmatic and careless distribution of resources could leave the more needy population such as suburban and rural schools and students further behind while taking care of the needs of those who are already well-resourced.

Overworked and Stressed Teachers

The benefits of market economy resulted in governmental and company investments did not seem to help teachers reduce their workloads and stress. On the contrary, various reforms under market economy seem to have increased teachers' workload and stress evidenced by the fact that the participants reported having taught 2–3 classes per semester with most of the class sizes ranging between 50 and 70 students. Many of the teachers taught approximately 200 students a semester and some taught up to 300 students. Even though grading assignment and lesson preparation varied depending on subject contents, the teachers participated in the study spent much time grading assignments, up to three hours daily in addition to many more hours they spent on lesson preparation. For many teachers, teaching and grading took almost all of their work hours during the day, especially for homeroom teachers. Additionally,

teachers tutored students between classes or after school often outside their work hours and responsibility.

The teachers also felt tremendous stress inflicted on them by the competitive *Gakao* (university entrance examination) pressure intensified by the market economy system. All 22 teachers pointed out that they and their fellow teachers were stressed because of the high expectations and demands from parents, schools, and teachers themselves. Parents count on teachers to prepare their children to pass *Gaokao* and get into their dream universities, which usually are the key universities. Schools also look to teachers for maintaining and raising their reputation by getting higher percentage of their students admitted into top-tier universities such as Beijing and Qinghua universities. Several teachers mentioned that their schools evaluated their teaching achievements by ranking students' test scores weekly and monthly. Although teachers understood that schools do it with an intention that teachers could see the differences and learn from one another, "the pressure on teachers is tremendous. ... scores speak to all. Even a difference of 0.2 is considered a gap", Teacher 17 said.

It is clear that both the parents and schools evaluated teachers' achievements based on students' test scores and *Gaokao*. As a result, teachers had to work hard to help achieve those goals. This is very well summarized by Teacher 18 as follows:

It's a really big pressure for us. Although schools do not prioritize and emphasize much about the numbers of the students going to college and percentages of them being admitted to the key universities, that is de facto the measure of schools' success. There is nothing that we can do to change how people think. As key middle schools, people care more about your achievement in terms of percentage of students going to colleges. If you don't get good *Gaokao* scores, nobody acknowledges what efforts you have put in. It is what it is. Parents have high expectations towards their children regardless of their abilities. All they think is that they sent you to this school and you should go to one of the key universities.

While *Gaokao* was always important and competitive in China, including *Xishi*, the influence of market economy seems to have intensified the competition much more due to the increasing competition for jobs. As explained by the participants in the study, under planned economy system, all university graduates were guaranteed jobs that were assigned to them. Under the market economy system, people have the freedom to choose jobs on their own, the advantage of which is that graduates look for what they would like to have rather than being stuck with jobs that they are assigned to have. However, as the prosperity resulted from market economy enabled more students obtaining college diplomas, the competition for job market increased fiercely, which also increased the competition for getting into the best universities in the nation as a way to secure good jobs upon graduation. Teachers further pointed out that market economy created a strong competition among schools that compete with one another on *Gaokao* scores and the percentage of students admitted to key universities, both

of which help recruit more of the best students and attract more funding. All these competition add to teachers' workload and stress as they are pressured to work harder and more to help more of their students secure entrance into top universities.

The fact that teachers work extra hours and teach and tutor students after school and during weekends is also partly due to the competition. Teachers complained that *Gaokao* related pressures and workload impacted their health negatively evidenced by weaker immune system and depression for some, especially among homeroom teachers who work longer hours undertaking more responsibilities and tasks, checking homework, solving problems, coordinating with other subject teachers, and communicating with parents by organizing parent-teacher meetings after school (see Beckett, 2012; Guo et al., 2013 for further details).

The participants elaborated that university entrance based heavily on college entrance test scores, school education, especially high school education focused mostly on transmitting knowledge for exam purposes and test taking skills training. Many teachers expressed concerns about such an extreme focus on intellectual knowledge and test skills stating that such narrow focus neglects moral education and character building as well as psychological development of their students. As explained in the excerpt from Teacher 18.

I think we should acknowledge our economical development and achievement since the market economy reform, even though we have not been fully accepted into the world economy and that there are still many issues that need to be fixed. However, we cannot ignore the development of humanity anymore. We should pay more attention to the development of social sciences and humanity disciplines, the study of social phenomena as well addressing psychological and ideological issues and development, without which our education that focuses too much on instant economic benefits and intellectual knowledge would produce mediocrity at best.

Some participants were worried about the impact of such neglect of moral and ethical education, expansion from schools to society as a whole in the name of economic development. Many teachers were nostalgic of the days when their students received more well-rounded broad education and said that students in the past were better developed both in regular school subjects as well as physical, moral, and citizenship educations in much more effective and relaxed environment. They lamented that their current students do not have many extracurricular activities due to tremendous *Gaokao* pressure. Teachers thought that missing of moral education could cause many psychological and mental issues, presenting challenges to both parents and teachers. Teacher 18:

Humanity and moral issues, broadly speaking can be beliefs or faiths, have been neglected. Many social problems have occurred such as psychological issues and mental illness. Suicide rate has increased among both students and common people.

Furthermore, teachers were under tremendous pressure to update knowledge and improve teaching quality to meet the changing needs of curriculum and students. They were in constant professional development state learning new technologies and teaching strategies self-teaching and participating in professional development programs. They feared that their knowledge would be outdated if they did not learn new things and that they would be replaced if their teaching did not bring positive learning outcomes for students, which students and their parents could report to school authorities.

Obviously, the market economy reform contributed to improving physical school environment and students and parents. However, it did not seem to have positively impacted teachers' physical and emotional wellbeing. On the contrary, the reform seems to have added to the teachers' workload and stress as the teachers felt the constant pressure to engage in professional development to keep up with the changes and help their schools and their students to compete for higher scores and university admissions. These findings confirm S. Guo (2012) and Li (2012) findings which showed that teachers participated in those studies also felt overworked and stressed due to changes resulted from market economy reform.

Teacher-Parent and Teacher-Student Communication

The teachers participated in the study stated that the impact of market economy also changed their work with parents who became more educated and knowledgeable, posing challenges to communication with them. While Chinese parents always valued education, parents see education even more importantly setting higher expectations for their children, teachers, and schools due to more intense competition under market economy. According to the participants, instead of respecting teachers' knowledge and expertise in teaching as they used to, parents make comments on and suggestions for education and teaching methods. If they disagree or dislike a teacher's method, they contact school principals, which sometimes can result in replacement of teachers. Teacher 10, who taught since mid-1980s, witnessed the changes in teacher-parent communication:

One or two decades ago, teachers not only taught students but also students' parents. That was how things were done. But the economic development of the country has put an increasing demand on us, particularly with regards to parent teacher communication as the communication nowadays is on equal basis. Teachers are really polite to parents in a way that parents begin to teach teachers. 20 years ago, parents would feel intimidated by and highly respectful of teachers. But generally, they showed high respect towards teachers. Now parents are more knowledgeable and they could make comments about and suggestions for your teaching, a phenomenon that is becoming prevalent.

As we see here, market economy seems to have created another kind of inequality that added to teachers' stress. That is, because of the market economy system, teachers and their students' parents no longer receive equal pay for their jobs as they did under planned economy. As a result, parents could be in financially superior position to teachers and therefore feel more important and feel comfortable about making demands, a finding revealed in Y. Guo (2012) and discussed earlier in the current chapter.

According to the teachers, students grew up under market economy are also more challenging to teach. For example, abundantly resourced with computers and internet, students are exposed to all kinds of information some of which teachers may not even know, putting demands on "teachers to have improved and more in-depth knowledge and better teaching techniques" (Teacher 10). Students are more confident, but are also individualistic. Further, they lack social skills and diligence, necessitating teachers to rethink the content they teach as well as strategies they use for teaching them, another source of additional workload and stress.

"Bilingual" Education

Another impact of market economy on teachers in *Xishi* is that of *Hanyu* medium instruction, which the local government and the teachers refer to as "bilingual" education. This is a model that requires content subjects (except language arts and music) teaching and learning be carried out in *Hanyu* by all teachers including local indigenous teachers who do not speak *Hanyu* as their first language. The purpose of the "bilingual education" policy and practice is to accelerate the spread of *Hanyu* among non-*Han* indigenous population under the rhetoric of opportunity. *Hanyu* has been part of local education for decades, but until the introduction of market economy system, it was taught as a second language while content subjects were taught and learned in indigenous languages such as Uyghur and Kazakh, except to those who chose to attend *Hanyu* medium of instruction schools. As pointed out in Beckett (2012) and Beckett and Pistiglone (2012), it is important for all citizen of P. R. C., including indigenous peoples of *Xisheng*, to learn *Hanyu*. However, requiring all teachers to teach most school subjects in it before they are sufficiently resourced and prepared linguistically and pedagogically can be detrimental to educational development and present various challenges and frustrations.

The participants in the current study pointed out that if implemented well, a real bilingual education model can help improve education quality through sharing resources from both indigenous language (*minyü*) and *Hanyu* departments. It could equip students for more job opportunities and better understanding among students and teachers of different ethnicities with improved communication skills. Many of the teachers grew up locally and received their education in their native languages were asked to teach with little *Hanyu* they acquired during college in no more than a year or two, which was far from sufficient time to acquire a language to teach in

it. Moreover, the teachers participated in the study were stressed with concerns that their students did not have sufficient *Hanyu* proficiency to understand what was taught to them. They were worried that the “bilingual” education policy was carried out too soon before necessary resources were in place and before students and teachers were ready for it. The following excerpt from Teacher 5 explains it well:

... bilingual education can be effective, but it's been implemented too fast too soon. It was introduced to middle school students who never learned in *Hanyu* before. It needs a process, actually a long one, for students to learn the language enough to be able to learn in it.

Clearly, “bilingual” education is promotion of *Hanyu* towards monolingual policy and practice implemented without sufficient and necessary resources such as qualified teachers. It was also implemented to teach students who did not have threshold *Hanyu* proficiency to learn in it jeopardizing students educational development despite ample research evidence that concluded necessity of five to seven years for learners in second language to be able to learn academic subjects in it (see Cummins, 1984; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

According to the participants, various after school and summer time professional development opportunities were available for improving their *Hanyu* proficiency locally as well as in other parts of the country. However, taking advantage of those opportunities proved to be challenging due to teachers' busy teaching schedule and schools' inability to arrange for substitute teachers, leaving most of these teachers resorting to self-teaching and learning from their Han colleagues. Such arrangements, however, were disempowering for the local teachers as it puts them in subordinate position making them the learners from their *Han* colleagues whose first language was made to be the language of instruction, rather than colleagues who learn from each other with equal positions. There is no doubt that various reform, especially the “bilingual” education model, added stress to indigenous teachers.

Need Recognition and Help

As discussed earlier, teachers participated in the study acknowledged positive impacts of market economy citing improved work environment and life in general (also see Beckett, 2012; Guo et al., 2013). A further analysis of the data, however, also showed discontent with undifferentiated monthly salaries that do not match inflation making raising families and attending to their elderly challenging, which the teachers said was demotivating. Teacher 8:

Regardless of the different amount individuals invest in their work, everyone gets similar amount of pay. There is an end-of-the-year workload evaluation that is used for some bonus pay or deduction of pay depending on the workload. But the amount of the bonus is too small to make any difference for higher motivation. In fact, it's demotivating.

The sentiment regarding discrepancy between workload and payment was further elaborated by homeroom teachers who stated that the subsidies (e.g., 30 yuan = \$5.09 USD monthly stipend plus 400 yuan = \$68.03 USD for annual performance) for extra responsibilities were far from matching the workload that required by those tasks. The teachers also felt insufficient societal recognition for the value of work and lack of collegial and societal acknowledgment for their psychological wellbeing. They wished their governments did something to help them get the recognition they deserved so that they could contribute more happily.

There seems to be frustration among teachers regarding discrepancies between expected income for teachers' investment in their work and the actual income as well as teachers' income and their needs, which is another source of stress. We asked the teachers what, if any, are the channels through which they express their concerns and have them addressed. According to the participants, issues and concerns were usually taken to teachers' union, which acts as a bridge between the teachers and the school administrations through annual teachers' representative council meetings. Teachers' representative councils gather teachers' concerns and opinions and make suggestions to the school administrators at the annual meetings, where all the important policies are discussed and approved. However, some teachers pointed out that the role of the council meeting is not that important as very few suggestions made by teachers are included in the final policies or implementation. In fact, as pointed out by one teacher, the annual meeting time had been reduced from two-days to less than a half day.

Teachers' unions also carry out activities such as distributing holiday gifts; organizing celebratory and sports activities; and visiting retired and sick teachers. Other union activities included psychology expert lectures on stress management as well as school-wide free physical examination organized once every two years. Teachers acknowledged the work that the union did for them (e.g., sports activities that the union organized) and its role as a bridge between teachers and administrators. Nevertheless, some teachers were also critical of their union for not reaching out to all teachers as some of them did not even know who their union representatives were. Others thought that direct communication between individual teachers and principals could be more efficient and effective.

There seems to be frustration among teachers regarding perceived deficiencies between amount work and level of income and their financial obligations to their families. There also seemed to be frustrations about the mechanism to access to the administration with their concerns and issues as the teachers' union did not appear to have done an efficient and effective job of representing teachers and attending to their welfare under the market economy system. For example, while it is good that the union represented teachers through teachers' representative council, an annual meeting is far from sufficient to address the changing needs of teachers.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We discussed a case study that explored northwestern P. R. C. teachers' perspectives on teaching under market economy system. Findings revealed that teachers thought market economy benefited their working conditions, but the profits of market economy could be more equally shared and investments could be more thoughtfully made. Findings of the study also suggest that teachers were under constant time, physical, and emotional stress as they underwent frequent professional development and worked with more resourceful students as well as their more demanding parents. Teachers reported discrepancies between their salaries and effort and wishes for recognition and assistance. Indigenous teachers raised concerns about negative impacts of "bilingual education", the *de facto Hanyu* medium instruction practice policy and practice on minority students' knowledge acquisition and educational development.

These findings signal a need for a more systematic and planned reform that integrates the voices of people such as teachers who are directly impacted by the reform and establish investment policies that benefit more schools, particularly suburban and rural schools that are in more dire needs. It is obvious that *Xisheng* and *Xishi* governments could do a better job of benefiting schools, teachers, and students by investing revenue gained through market economy system. Specifically, they can hire more teachers to reduce class size which can contribute to better quality education and healthier work-force as that could ease teachers' pressures with fewer work hours. As suggested by the participant in the study, a more scientific evaluation system could be developed for teaching assessment as well as university entrance that takes into consideration the long term effect of teaching and learning on students' life-long learning. Support that mediates teacher parent and teacher student interaction and communication should also be put in place to relieve teachers' of stress.

Researchers and policy-makers need to evaluate the "bilingual" education policy and practice to generate better policy that has students' educational needs and psychological wellbeing in mind. They also need to study indigenous teachers' concerns and needs regarding teaching in a language that they do not have sufficient proficiency in and put in place a more reasonable professional development policy and practice.

It appears that, while much has changed due to market economic reform, the role of teachers union has not. While sports activities, free health examination, and stress reduction lectures are helpful, teachers' unions could adjust to the needs of contemporary teachers and help them address more specific needs such negotiation of workload reduction and salary adjustment for teachers. It should facilitate negotiation and establishment of labour rights to collectively bargain stress free work environment for teachers.

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