

Chapter 4

Case 1—Fengping Ethnic Middle School, Yunnan Province



4.1 Background

4.1.1 Ecological–Cultural Background

Fengping is located in the southeast of Luxi City, Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. According to statistics (Sude, 2013), Dai people live in concentrated communities in the hilly areas, of a total of 381 km². Fengping has low-latitude subtropical climate: the average temperature is 15.5 °C and the average rainfall is 2.15 mm.

There are 12,075 households in total, in which agricultural households account for 94%. The total population is 62,325, including Dai, Han, and De'ang people) among others) of which Dai people account for 83.4%. The total cultivated land area is 99,863 Mu, and the per-person cultivated land area is 1.7 Mu.

Dai are people who emphasize etiquette and tend to have “herd mentality.” What impressed us most was how much Dai people spoil their children. They are hospitable and enjoy dining together.

Nearly all the Dai people believe in Theravada Buddhism and every village has a Zangfang (Buddhist temple). People who are over 40 usually go to Zangfang to cultivate themselves.

4.1.2 General Situation of the School

Fengping School is a junior boarding school in Luxi City, whose students are mainly from five Dai villages and Padixinqiao village in the Fengping area. The school has a standard comprehensive building and two old teaching buildings, one girls' dormitory and one boys' dormitory. The school occupies 32,479, 2578 m² of which is classrooms, 374 m² of which is laboratories, 1770 m² of which is teachers' living quarters, 1907 m² of which is students' dormitory, 352 m² of which is canteen, and

6990 m² of which is the playground. The school has 68 computers, 8068 books, and 380 GB of electronic books.

There are 1135 registered students, 589 boys and 546 girls. One thousand twenty-eight of them are ethnic minority students including 996 Dai students, 23 Achang students, and nine students of other ethnic minorities. Minority students account for 91% of the school population. The dropout rate in 2009 was 2.56%.

The school has 89 staff members, including 82 full-time teachers (seven middle school senior teachers, 47 middle school first-class teachers, 26 middle school junior teachers, and two teachers unrated) and seven workers.

There are 47 female teachers and 42 male teachers. Seventeen of the teachers are ethnic minorities: ten of them are Dai, three of them Jingpo, and four of them belong to other ethnic minorities.

Three teachers are younger than 25 years old, 11 teachers are between the age of 25 and 30, 14 teachers between the age of 31 and 35, 25 teachers between the age of 36 and 40, 17 teachers between the age of 41 and 45, ten teachers between the age of 46 and 50, and two teachers between the age of 51 and 55.

There are 82 full-time teachers: 47 of them have a bachelor's degree, 21 of them a junior college diploma, and two of them a technical secondary school diploma.

The staff–student ratio is 89/1135; full-time teacher–student ratio is 82/1135. Dai teacher–student ratio is 10/996, and full-time Dai teacher–Dai student ratio is 7/996.

The current principal is Han Chinese. Before joining the school, he worked in the secondary school of Jiangdong (Han area) for 14 years so he has extensive experience in teaching and management. He told us: *“Our school is in a suburban mountain area. and students mostly come from the five nearby villages. Dai students account for more than 90% of the entire student population, so the school is almost purely Dai. According to the ethnic situation, the school has set up classes on ethnic minority culture. Dai students have weak academic background, but with favorable policies towards ethnic education, the scale of our school is expanding, and the number of students has increased to 1135 from the previous 825. In 2008, student enrollment reached over one thousand for the first time. The Dai secondary school is different from the Secondary School of Jiangdong. There are more Han Chinese children in the Secondary School of Jiangdong and the school can get more support from parents. Dai parents do not care too much about the children’s learning. When I first came here, there were conflicts between the teachers. They were not enthusiastic about teaching and the quality of teaching was bad. There were only two or three students who could enter senior highs at that time, but we had more than twenty last years. I have developed a layered incentive-based teaching scheme, which is officially approved by the bureau. But we simply cannot put a student who gets 90 and a student who gets 9 in the same classroom, can we? This is what we had to do.”*

We understand that the so-called classified teaching is to allocate students into advanced classes and regular classes by their entrance exam scores. The whole school has eight advanced classes and 15 regular classes. The exam-passing rate is very low. The average scores for Chinese and Maths are mostly between 15 and 20 points. The students from advanced classes have much better grades than students from regular classes, especially in terms of senior high admission rate. In the survey,

we discovered that expectations for and investment in advanced classes are much greater than regular classes. Advanced classes have better teachers. Additionally, students seem to enjoy learning and they work hard in the advanced classes. During the interviews, many teachers said they believe that students from advanced classes demonstrate high learning enthusiasm and self-discipline; therefore, the teachers are enthusiastic about teaching these students. Upon investigation, we learned that the school does not have a better strategy for students who have poor scores and for those who dislike learning. Currently, these students stay in school just to complete compulsory education. The principal is also confused about what to do with these students, how to guide them, and how to improve their learning. The current plan is to continue the classified teaching scheme.

Fengping School divides students into eight advanced classes and 15 regular classes based on their entrance examination scores. Students all talk in Dai after classes. In class, the teachers make them speak Chinese and the class is taught in Chinese. Most teachers are Han. Even a Dai teacher seldom teaches bilingually. According to the questionnaires, students who do not understand their teachers in class account for 33.5%. On the question of “which language do you prefer your teacher to speak in class?”, of all the 79 students from ordinary class, 23 chose “both Chinese and ethnic language” for the reason “I wish teachers to explain in Dai when we don’t understand.” However, the teachers think that bilingual teaching surely is mandatory in primary school, and language problems should have been solved in primary school. It is no longer necessary to teach bilingually in middle schools.

4.2 Research Methods and Process

The data collection methods include interviews, observations, questionnaires, and fieldwork diaries. The research goal is to analyze and study the process and the implementation of basic education policies for ethnic minorities in Luxi. The fieldwork in Fengping School lasted from May 25 to May 31, seven days in total. The research participants included officials from the local Education Bureau, Education Research Center and the Municipal Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, principals, teachers, students, community members, and parents.

During our fieldwork, we observed six classes and collected 140 questionnaires by students in Grade 8, 42 teacher questionnaires, two headmaster questionnaires. We also interviewed seven staff members, including two principals, four teachers, one dormitory supervisor, and one folk artist. We interviewed 16 students, including three Han students. We also visited two communities and interviewed five parents.

During the investigation, we also encountered some problems. Fengping School uses streaming teaching methods in which students are divided into advanced classes and regular classes. When we expressed interests in seeing the classes, we were first given the opportunity to observe four advanced classes. After some negotiation, we were finally able to visit a regular class. We also found a lot of problems with our questionnaires for the students. There is no problem for the students of advanced class

to answer them. However, in regular classes, several boys did not have pens to write with and showed some resistance in answering the questionnaire. Some students did not understand the questions and some Dai students even wrote the character for Dai as Tai. Finally, with the teacher's supervision and our encouragement, most students finished the survey. Overall, we can feel that the students respect their teachers and they look forward to their attention and encouragement.

We went into two Dai communities to interview parents, and it was quite difficult for Dai parents to express themselves in Chinese when we communicated with them, so we invited some guides and students to interpret for us.

4.3 Focus on Basic Education Policies for Ethnic Minorities

4.3.1 Boarding System

The boarding system in Fengping School has a long history and the school has rich experience in dormitory management. According to the statistics on May 20, 2010, there were 656 boarding students, 254 boys and 402 girls. The school established a series of regulations on dormitory management and reinforced the management of sanitation and epidemic prevention.

We observed that there were 12 bunk beds in every dorm. The dorms are well ventilated and safe. There was fire-control equipment in the dormitory building and a place for drying clothes on the ground floor. It is neat and tidy inside the dorm building and in the yard. The boys' dormitory and girls' dormitory are within the same bounding wall and the public bathroom is 500 m away from the dormitories out of the bounding wall. The school has no hot water and there are no closets in the dormitories. Students' dishware and toothbrushes are placed here and there, on the windowsills or in the washroom.

The school is located in the center of the town, so transportation is convenient, and most students live nearby, about 15 min to one-and-a-half-hour walk from the school. Students can ask for day-offs if necessary, and generally, boarding students do not seem to experience strong homesick feelings.

The canteen kitchen is small, consisting of several flat-house rooms. The students' dining place is also small. The open big cote is their dining place, with a cement table and four small wooden tables. The students have dinner here only when it rains. They usually have dinner under the trees or in the dorms.

The school canteen is run by a private contractor. The meal prices are 1 *yuan* for a meat dish and 0.5 *yuan* for a vegetable dish. The dishes are usually bought in cash. Rice is 90 cents and it is usually bought with a rice ticket. Students usually spend 2–2.5 *yuan* per meal. The school has a special manager for the canteen. It is clean inside the canteen and there is a special wash sink for the cutlery. It is crowded when students are buying meals. They do not wait in line, but no one wastes food.

The clinic next door brings convenience for the school. *“Next door there is a clinic. We have a special hallway to the clinic. If students are sick at midnight, we can send them there directly,”* the director of teaching affairs said in an interview.

School security was being strengthened when we visited. In order to build a safe schoolyard and to ensure the safety of teachers and students, Fengping School employs two full-time security guards.¹

The dorm management is very difficult. During the interview, a school chief said *“Dai students have bad habits and are not good at self-control. In addition, there are many juvenile delinquency cases outside the school, which brings more difficulties to the school management.”*

The dormitory manager Mr. Han has been in charge of dormitory management for 22 years and he speaks fluent Dai language. He knows Dai students well and does his job with skill and ease. He told us about his management style: *“children are mischievous. I discipline them with soft and hard means at the same time. My management style is very strict, but students like me. For example, I often pretend to beat the students who don’t obey rules with a stick. I lift up their clothes, make noises deliberately, and let other students know that they were beaten but in fact they are not hurt, I just want to give them a lesson, and let other students see. Dai children care about face very much. When they see a friend criticized by the teacher, they will behave well. In fact, I don’t think small things should be reported to the school. I like to give kids a second chance. If we really have no choice, we can report them to the school.”* When asked *“what is the most troublesome thing in your management,”* he answered: *“Security. I worry that students will sneak out at night and make them register for going to washroom at night. Some girls manage to get out anyways. There are some unemployed young people in the neighborhood. Mobile phones are common these days and once they contact via mobile phones, we don’t know what could happen. There is no washroom in the dormitory building (they may sneak out, saying they are going to the washroom).”*

Through questionnaires and interviews, we learn that most students prefer boarding. According to the questionnaires, 32.1% of the students like boarding very much, 30.0% of them like it fine, 16.4% of the students somewhat like boarding, and 10.0% do not like boarding at all. The reason why students prefer boarding is that they get *“more friends in school, [it is] jolly and convenient.”* Parents would like to let their children live in school because they feel reassured when their children are there. They do not have to worry about their safety on the way to school. Some boys often go to school by motorcycle, which can be troublesome. During the interview, some boys said *“although the school does not allow us to ride motorcycles, we often park them in the vicinity of our school where teachers cannot see.”* Also, parents favor the strict management style in school. Parents said that they feel reassured when their children are in school, because children often run out to play at night when attending day schools and they are afraid that their children would fall under bad influence. What is more, when asked *“Is the school food tasty and do you have enough to eat?”* students answered differently. *“It’s OK, I have enough food.”* some said, *“I*

¹Statistics on the Fulfillment of School Security of Luxi City.

don't often eat at school. I eat snacks.” We also found out that children bring pocket money from home. A child spends 8–10 *yuan* every day on average, and the subsidy is only enough to cover two weeks, so parents have to provide the rest.

The school organizes evening self-study, which ensures study results and increases communication between the teachers and the students. It improves students' comprehensive quality, such as interpersonal skills and self-care ability (Chen, 2008).

During the interview, a school chief mentioned that the student dormitories can only accommodate 700 students. With the expansion of the school, there is not enough dormitory space for every student. Thus, some students can only attend day school. *“We cannot ensure the security of the students who attend day school, so we allow students to skip night classes, but their study time may be less than the boarders.”* In addition, boys' and girls' dormitories are in the same yard, which also brings challenges to management. Based on our survey, the canteen lacks infrastructure facilities and the hardware is not good enough.

To build a better environment for top students, the dorm arrangements of advanced classes and regular classes are different. First, nearly all the students in advanced classes are required to live on campus for the convenience of having evening self-study. Second, the school has preferential treatment for ten top students in the advanced class, arranging them in several smaller dorms with better conditions and relatively free schedule. Top students include boys and girls, Dai and Han.

The school takes special measures for its conditions. A parent said that the school does not allow students in regular classes to live on campus and gives priority to top students. Such phenomenon has been found in Grades 7 and 8, but a parent of a Grade 9 student said it is true that the school forbids some students to live in school because they are afraid that they will cause trouble.

There are conflicts and discrimination among boarders. We learned from a Han student that Dai students sometimes bully Han students, such as asking for rice tickets with threatening words or behaviors and peeing in Han students' dishware. The school took some measures to arrange dorms for Han students separately.

4.3.2 Ethnic Cultures Entering School

Many Dai children are good at singing and dancing, and they like drawing (Yin, 2005, pp. 71–79). The school has a special class for Dai dancing. Many graduates from this class become members of the “Yunnan Impression” art troupe or dancers with other troupes.

“Provincial departments have been advocating ethnic cultures entering schools, but no specific policies or regulations have been formulated yet,” a former section chief of provincial education departments said. In Luxi, considering the features of the local ethnic minorities, some specialty classes were opened in primary and secondary schools, integrating aspects of ethnic cultures, such as ethnic dancing and

music instruments, into teaching and activities.² The purpose was to carry forward intangible local cultures and to arouse students' interests.

In his interview, a headmaster thought that ethnic schools have their own unique resources, which deserve to be developed. This school opened a class of Dai dancing and keeps developing new classes, such as classes of Hulusi (cucurbit flute), bamboo wares, and paper-cutting. Teachers all acknowledge and appreciate Dai students' art gifts and wish for them to develop further in this field (Sude, 2008).

Students' opinions on classes of specialty vary. In the interviews, we find that most students love singing and dancing and would like to learn dancing. A student (a boy from a regular class) was discontented about the enrollment of specialty class: "*The enrollment was over when we entered the school and we were not allowed to transfer to that class.*" "*The worst class in the school is that class of specialty, those who learn dancing,*" another student, a girl from an advanced class, said. We can sense her prejudice about the class of specialty.

The policy implementation is helpful to secure good student resources, increase the efficiency of school management, and gain a good reputation. The higher authorities and the leaders of the school all highly appreciate the effect of special classes. Because of the poor local cultural atmosphere, the enrollment rate and promotion rate are hard to be increased. Students' knowledge is not solid and appears hard to build up. To solve the problems, the school has to establish its own brand of ethnic characteristics. They send students specializing in arts to higher-level schools every year. Now, the school has been appointed as the base school for the Affiliated High School of Yunnan Art College and has earned a good reputation.³ It is beneficial to the transmission and inheritance of ethnic traditional cultures.

A school leader also told us that an old folk artist initiatively came to the school and taught peacock dancing. Fang Guiying, 70, transmitter and inheritor of peacock dancing, love Dai culture: "*Now fewer and fewer people can do the peacock dance. I am afraid that good culture would be lost, so I come here initiatively to teach for free,*" she said in her interview. She spoke highly of the students. When asked about students' interests and skills, she said, "*These students have strong receptivity, and they all love dancing. The only shortcoming is the lack of vivid facial expression.*"

4.3.2.1 Difficulties

School leaders mentioned the difficulties they face during the interviews. Hardware conditions are limited. On the one hand, the present dance room is of double-duty, as it is both used as students' dancing room and staff meeting room. So, students have to move over 80 desks and chairs every time they have a dancing class. On the other

²Summarized from the interviews with leaders of the Education Bureau and Education Research Center.

³Management and Development Ways of Rural Dai Junior Middle School in Border Areas—Exploration of Fengping Junior Middle School for Ethnic Minorities of Luxi City on Management Characteristics, December 20, 2008.

hand, equipments and funds are in need. The leader said, “*The problem is mainly about the examination expenditure of art students. Whenever they go to take exams, accommodation, meal expenses, entry fee and costume expenses are quite expensive for both the school and the students.*”

4.3.3 Two Exemptions and One Subsidy

According to the plan of the new three-year “Prospering Frontier and Enriching People Project” of Luxi, the government will put more efforts on the “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy” of compulsory education in rural areas. The subsidy to the registered students of compulsory education will be extended and the amount of subsidy will be increased (Gui & Zhong, 2010). The local government will solicit 75,500,000 yuan from the central and provincial governments. The municipal Education Bureau is responsible for the implementation.⁴

During fieldwork, the school principal, teachers, and students have different understanding of the standard of the policy of “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy,” the amount of the subsidy and the sources of the subsidy.

Students’ answers:

Student A (boy, Grade 1, used to be a boarder): “*The subsidy is about 80 yuan per month. Boarders have the subsidy and non-boarders don’t; students get the subsidy in person. It’s spent on games and drinking.*”

Student B (boy, Grade 2, boarder): “*Every student gets 75 yuan per month, and boarders get an extra 15 yuan per month. It is given to us directly. I spend the money on games.*”

Student C (girl, Grade 2, boarder): “*75 yuan per month.*” The teacher said, “*Some institution will come to count the number (of boarders). Don’t skip classes. When they come and count, whoever comes gets the money. If you are not present, you will not be given the money. Maybe once a month. It seems that they give out the money whenever they want to.*”

Teachers’ answers:

Teacher A (leader): “*the accommodation subsidy is 750 yuan per year, no extra poverty subsidy.*”

Teacher B (class supervisor in Grade 2): “*a stipend of 15 yuan per student, poverty subsidy 50 yuan per student last year. The stipend for this year hasn’t been worked out nor granted.*”

⁴Circular of the People’s Government of Luxi on Printing and Issuing the New Three-year Prospering Frontier and Enriching People Project.

Parents' answers:

Parent A *"I don't know how much the subsidy is exactly, as it is deposited directly into the meal card. My child has never brought cash back. Students of advanced classes don't have to pay cash for dinner, just punching the card."*

Parent B *"I know they have subsidies, but I don't know when and how much. My child does not tell me, so I don't know. I don't care."*

Parent C *"Yes, there is a little. But I don't know how much. My child brought back 80 yuan once. It seems that the amount depends on exam results."*

In further research, a teacher mentioned that there are two kinds of subsidies: *one is a living subsidy for primary and secondary school students, 15 yuan per student per month, but students get 12 yuan each, which is universal in any school. The other is a poverty subsidy, 75 yuan per student per month. It's for each student theoretically, but the number of students allowed by the higher authorities is often smaller, so the school only gives this subsidy to diligent students.*

On the one hand, this shows that people who implement the local policy and people who benefit from the local policy do not understand the policy clearly. They do not know the specific standards and the contents of the policy. On the other hand, the policy beneficiary groups do not care about their rights. They do not understand the policies concerning their interest (Chen, 2008). To some extent, this also results in ambiguity when the policy is implemented and poor results.

"Since the implementation of 'Two Exemptions and One Subsidy,' the central government has carried out the free textbook initiative, with limitations. School-based materials are not included. Previously, the central government granted some funds for the school-based curriculum. But now, the central government stipulates that schools are not allowed to charge any fees. The provincial government no longer funds schools for school-based curricula. Funding becomes a big problem," a leader of Education Research Center shared with us. We can see that because of the restraints of local financial resources or other factors, the implementation of a certain policy may affect another one.

The headmaster thinks that the distribution standard of financial subsidies is too even, without taking into consideration the actual economic income of different regions and families. In the interview, the headmaster says that *"the country covers 70% of expenses, while the province covers 30%. The county can get a little money. Although this policy is very good, I feel that the implementation is not good for the minority regions, especially in mountainous poverty-stricken areas (like my hometown) where the annual income is just more than 700 yuan. This small amount of money is just the average income of some families. The poor families who can't afford the tuition still can't go to school."* In addition, *"Living subsidy is allocated annually, but the school begins in September. Some students can't enjoy the subsidy for half a year and the money goes to other students."*

Teachers think that the problem of dropout rates due to poverty has been solved since the implementation of the policy, and dropout rates have got controlled to some extent. A teacher said during the interview, *"The dropout rate was higher before our*

government adopted the policy of “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy” because the parents could not afford the tuition fees.”

During the parents’ interviews, when asked “if there have been changes since the government’s implementation of the policy of “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy,” several families explained that the policy has reduced their financial burden.

From the above interviews, we learn that since the central government implemented the policy of “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy,” students’ life has improved greatly and dropout due to poverty has been held back.

Problems exist in the implementation of “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy” (Cui, 2010). First, the school allocates the subsidy flexibly, taking into consideration students’ marks. Whether such a distribution system can achieve the original goal of the policy remains to be discussed. Second, with the present income level, some families cannot afford children’s senior high school tuition fees. Some parents reflected in the interviews that they worry about education expenditure in senior high school because there is no subsidy for this education level.

4.3.4 Teacher Training

In recent years, teacher training has been organized. The only pattern of centralized training has been changed to multitraining patterns, such as intern training, on-the-job training, training through distance education, sending trainees to the countryside, and school-based training. (Gui & Zhong, 2010). Trainings are both short term and long term, and they are organized through participative learning, lectures, observing classes, joint teaching, and research.⁵

A leader of the Education Research Center explained that the number of trainees from Luxi in 2009 reached over 2400, including 550 promotion trainees, 200 distance training for headmasters, 30 long-term training for village-school headmasters. A few headmasters were sent to the provincial capital or Shanghai for training. Besides, the Education Research Center invited some experts to conduct full-time training on cadre management, organizational discipline, project leading, etc. He said that there are still many difficulties. *“First, there are difficulties in process management and effectiveness. How to promote pertinence and effectiveness still remains to be researched. Second, many teachers want to be sent out for training, but the school doesn’t have enough substitute teachers. Third, according to the No. 35 Order of Yunnan Province, two percent of education expenditure shall be used for education research and training. But it is hard to say how much 2% of education expenditure is. There is no special funding for teacher training.”*

According to the Circular of Yunnan Province on Guideline on Merit Pay Implementation in Schools of Compulsory Education, Luxi merit pay system for staff of compulsory education started on September 1, 2009. Merit pay includes basic salary

⁵Summarized from the interviews with several leaders of the Education Research Center of Luxi.

and bonus, among which the basic wages account for 70% of the total, and bonus account for 30% (Luo, 2009).

The school established a system of teacher training, including a teacher training plan and a plan for teacher professional development. The school gradually organized the selection, recommendation, training, and assessment systems of key teachers and subject leaders. Now, the school has completed the assessment and selection of key teachers for Chinese, English, music, P.E., and fine arts. It constantly organizes teacher training sessions (including intern training, computer training, teaching contests, model lessons, high-quality lessons, etc.).⁶

In addition, a comprehensive proposal for faculty and staff assessment of Fengping School has been formulated in line with the regulations of the Luxi Education Bureau on year-end assessment and the requirement of quantitative evaluation for primary and secondary school faculty and workers in Luxi.

In the interview, a leader said that education in Luxi is the education of frontier, poverty, and minority. In light of the actual education conditions in Luxi, he stressed the essential role of three key actors. The first is *teachers*: to cultivate key teachers and exert key teachers' leading role. The second is *researchers*: to make more efforts in educational research and to combine teacher training and teacher professional development. The third is *managers*: to actively exercise their guiding role.⁷

"Our bonus pay has been delayed. but teachers in the Kunming area have received their bonus. We don't know why. And the two-month salary for school breaks has also been delayed. It shouldn't have been delayed. Teachers are discontented with these aspects," teachers of the Education Research Center remarked.

Some policies issued by the central government are not in line with local conditions: *"The central government has been advocating school autonomy, but it is still very poor. When I need a teacher, I have no right of employing one. If a teacher is employed but not in accordance with the need of the school, what should I do? This year, the admission examination system was introduced in this area. But I am still confused. All the items in the exam are objective ones. As a test for teacher admission, it can't test teachers' teaching ability,"* a headmaster said, when asked about difficulties in implementing the policies.

The higher authorities did not offer support during implementation. The headmaster said that he had reported the issue of teacher training many times, but it has not been solved yet.

"There are 1135 registered students and 84 teachers. According to the policy, the staff quota now should be 84. But the actual approved quota is still 57 of 2007. The higher level said that we had been over-staffed. Actually, teachers are not enough. They didn't consider the number of students and the number of classes. Now the additional teachers only get paid minimum wages; for example, no matter how excellent a "rank 2" teacher is, if there are no vacancies in "rank 1" teachers, they can't be promoted."

⁶Report of Fengping Junior Middle School of Luxi on Self-evaluation of Work Goals.

⁷Summarized from interviews of the Education Bureau leaders.

At present, teacher training and assessment are tied together. Besides, open recruitment and last-one-out system motivate teachers to study. But problems remain such as over-formalization, lack of effectiveness. (Chen & Sude, 2005).

The conflicts between the teacher assessment system and teacher training are frustrating. *“Going out for training, a teacher has to ask for private leave, and the time gets deducted from the work attendance bonus and assessment marks. The school requires teachers to be trained and deducts teachers’ allowances. It’s conflicting. There are a series of rules and regulations and they are not helpful at all,”* a teacher said.

Fengping School centers on appropriate allocation of education resources, optimizing personnel structure and enhancing education quality. It is good for motivating teachers and improving teacher quality.

Fengping School now has 82 full-time teachers. Forty-seven have bachelor’s degrees, 21 graduated from junior colleges, and two graduated from special secondary schools. The pass rate is 98%.

Dropout control increases teachers’ burden. When asked about difficulties encountered in work, most teachers think it is dropout control. Some students do not come to school, and the school arranges for teachers to visit dropout students and persuade them to come back to school. One teacher said, *“Some students really don’t want to learn in school, but the state requires them to attend school. So junior high school teachers have to go to the countryside to advise students to go back to school every semester, 5 times per semester. They have to ride motorcycles to go to distant places. This is especially true for the head teacher of a class. Fengping School puts students into advanced classes and regular classes. My class is a regular class, and there are more than 50 students, and I’ve been to almost every student’s home.”*

Students’ knowledge is poor and it is hard for them to get a high score. Students from countryside schools in ethnic minority areas are those who cannot go to better schools in urban areas (Wang & Wan, 2006, pp. 96–103). They tend to be rebellious and weary of study. Most teachers think that students’ knowledge is poor and it is hard to arouse their interest in class.

A teacher argued that the entrance examination to junior middle school had been canceled since the implementation of nine-year compulsory education. Some students are sent to junior high schools before finishing primary school. Just as two primary school students of Grade 6 said: *“If students apply for the local ethnic minority middle school instead of the ethnic minority middle school in the prefecture or in the city, they can get in with any score. Students realize this early in primary school.”*

Competing for positions puts teachers under pressure. We learned during the interviews that teachers think competing for positions can urge teachers to improve, but they also feel pressured and have no sense of security.

The local cultural environment has an influence on teaching: *“Dai people have good incomes. They believe in Buddhism and follow fate and fortune, so they don’t force children to do things they don’t like. At the beginning of every term, teachers have to visit the students and persuade parents to let them go back to school,”* an

administrator said. Teachers express discontent to the parents in such situations. Teachers generally think that Dai parents are very different from Han parents.

4.3.5 *New Curriculum Reforms*

The leaders of the Education Bureau stated: “*After new curriculum training, most teachers attach importance to students’ independent study, and abandon the previous ‘cramming education’ method. Now teachers leave more time for student-based learning.*” The training for the New Curriculum Reforms lasted for four years, from 2002 to 2005. County and city-level departments were in charge of the trainings for primary school teachers. Prefecture-level departments took care of junior middle schools and provincial-level departments high schools. All the teachers attended the training. Intern training is popular among local headmasters and teachers.

As for class teaching, the advanced classes and regular classes are quite different in terms of study atmosphere and teachers’ devotion. The teachers from advanced classes are of higher ranks, and they apply the concepts and teaching methods of the new curriculum better.

Students listen to the teacher carefully and have great discussions in class. It is obvious that students take the initiative in learning.

Teachers make students preview new lessons, which proves to be effective. While teaching, teachers guide students throughout the whole lesson, pay attention to the difficult points and learning of the entire class, and motivate students with encouraging words.

Ordinary classes appear to be undisciplined. Except 6–7 students who listen carefully in the first two rows, the other students are not paying attention at all, even without books and pens. Some are sleeping, others are talking, and some are walking around, which affects teachers’ enthusiasm and teaching results.

When asked which policies affect his school negatively, the headmaster mentioned the New Curriculum Reforms: “*I am personally against the New Curriculum Reform. It’s not realistic.*”

A teacher said, “*I wrote an essay titled Reflections on the New Curriculum Reform. The school should pay attention to education-quality. The reform is just lip service. I don’t think it has been fulfilled. The main reason is that the education concept hasn’t been improved.*”

The coverage rate of the New Curriculum Reform training in this school reached 100%. All the full-time teachers have attended the following trainings: curriculum reflection and establishment, teaching techniques, new teaching material, and the curriculum evaluation.⁸

Most teachers have understood the ideas behind the New Curriculum Reform. According to the questionnaires we collected, for the question “I think I know the teaching concept of the New Curriculum Reform,” 7.3% teachers chose “Partially

⁸Information Table of Fengping Junior Middle School for Ethnic Minorities, Spring Semester 2009.

disagree,” 17.1% chose “Neither agree nor disagree,” 31.7% chose “Partially agree,” and 43.9% chose “Totally agree.”

Through the investigation in Fengping School, we learnt that the biggest obstacle in the implementation of the new curriculum is poor knowledge and low learning enthusiasm. A teacher claimed: *“If you are too strict with the students, they will loath you and run away. As a result, you have to invite them back to learn. There was a pupil in our class who hated learning. In elementary school, there are only two exams, Chinese and Maths, and he got 5 points all together. He may have guessed some right answers in multiple choice questions. The blank-filling questions were blank. Students like this are not willing to stay at school. It is useless to ask them to learn.”*

Students are seriously school-weary, which affects teaching negatively. A teacher said in an interview: *“Students’ sense of discipline is too poor. Some students are lazy and are hard to be disciplined. They are not interested in studying. Quite a few boys don’t want to learn at all. They have to sit in the classroom just because of compulsory education.”*

Students have poor knowledge and their receptivity is limited, but they have to meet the same standards, which brings great difficulty to teaching (Yin, 2005, pp. 38–46).

The New Curriculum Reforms and the related training do not appear to be realistic and effective. The goal has not been fulfilled. There is a gap between teachers’ understanding of the concept of the new curriculum and their actual teaching (Zhu & Yang, 2006, pp. 83–91). The local environment and culture had a great impact on teaching. In an interview with the teachers, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the local parents. Teachers generally felt that Dai parents differ from Han parents. They are not interested in children’s learning and their sense of education is weak. One teacher said, *“Most parents are reasonable, but we often meet some uncooperative parents. Some parents pretend they do not understand, and some parents say, ‘Do not come to persuade our children. He does not want to go to school and our family has nobody to do the farming.’ Some parents yelled at us, ‘let him be, we can’t discipline him. If you have means to persuade him, go ahead.”* As such, many parents said they did not understand their children’s learning very much. In addition, because of the influence of Theravada Buddhism, Dai parents never beat up their children. They just let them grow naturally, and even leave them to themselves, or spoil them (Yin, 2005, pp. 71–76). In the investigation process, many parents do not know what is going on with their children’s learning and they just let them be. The gap between family education and school education is one of the most difficult problems in ethnic education, which can prevent the implementation of the national basic education policy in local schools (Chang, 2007, pp. 54–61). In the survey, we also learned that Dai parents hold natural attitudes toward the children’s further education and their future. When asked about the future of their children, several parents said, *“Just let them be.”* In the survey, most teachers claimed that Dai parents spoil their children and do not have high expectations for their children.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 *Boarding System*

The school can provide only 700 beds to 1135 students, so some students have to live outside the school. The school is located in the town center, so transportation is convenient. The majority of students live near the school. They spend 15–60 min to go to school on foot. Because of safety issues, students who live far from school do not take part in the evening activities. Compared with boarders, they have less time to study. On this note, we think that the housing condition brings negative influences on students. First, for safety reasons, those who live far away do not attend evening self-study. As a result, they have less study hours than boarding students. Secondly, to improve study efficiency, the school gives priority of boarding and dormitory arrangement to top students to make sure they have adequate time for studying. The other students become “day-students.” Third, the washroom is too far. It is not only inconvenient but also brings difficulty to management. Some students often sneak out with the excuse of going to washroom at night. Therefore, to a great extent, the difficulties behind the implementation of policies are related to the school’s physical condition.

Fengping School is located in a suburban area. There are many unemployed young people there, often harassing students. To ensure school security, teachers are on duty 24 h. We find that dormitory management must meet ethnic minority students’ needs and grassroot experience plays an irreplaceable role. Dai culture and language are important for management. Many parents can not understand related policies due to language ability, which limits security education in school. Policy implementers should thus publicize and explain the policies in local ethnic minority languages to parents to ensure good results.

Boarding students and their families are the most direct beneficiaries. They are greatly influenced by the policies. We find that parents are very satisfied with dormitory management. They feel reassured when their children live in school, because management is strict. They do not have to worry about their children sneaking out of school or following bad examples.

We see that students’ hobbies are too simple and that they have few activities, and it is likely that they will shift their attention and interest to unhealthy habits, such as drinking, gambling, etc. Therefore, the school should organize activities after school, enriching their lives and studies (Cao & Wang, 2010).

4.4.2 *Ethnic Cultures Entering Schools*

The school has established its own ethnic characteristics and earned a good reputation. To develop ethnic minority culture, the school establishes and improves its management system and gives priority to ethnic cultural activities. Fengping School

sends a certain number of art students to higher-level schools every year. Now, it is a base for Yunnan Art College and has achieved good social benefits.

As for the policy of “Ethnic Cultures Entering Schools,” Yunnan provincial government has not made explicit provisions. The schools just opened after-class activities and specialty classes, according to local cultures and conditions. Teachers tutor students who fall behind in class and let advanced students develop their talents. In this way, students would want to stay in school. This approach also plays a role in the protection and inheritance of ethnic minority culture (Zhu & Yang, 2006, pp. 7–15).

4.4.3 “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy” Policy

Since the central government carried out “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy” policy, students’ lives have improved a lot and the dropout rate has been greatly reduced. There are some problems. Firstly, since the implementation of this policy, most students do not face financial hardships anymore, but it is not equal for everyone. Secondly, because of the quota of subsidies, the school distributes them flexibly according to academic achievements and performance. Thirdly, the information campaigns for schooling are not fully conducted. Students and parents do not know the amount and criteria of the exemption or newly issued policies and measures. Fourthly, some families are not able to afford senior high school. Fifthly, headmasters think that the distribution of subsidies is too even and it is difficult to improve impoverished students’ living conditions. As a result, the policy goal is not fulfilled (Chen & Li, 2010).

4.4.4 Teacher Training

There are many systems and plans of teacher training, but they are scattered and imperfect. Teacher training lacks systematic support, definite plans, and funds. There are no special institutions and measures to fulfill the policy. Different people had different reactions during our investigation. Firstly, what the local teachers lack is education techniques. Secondly, good training is needed. Some training has no appropriate trainers. The training only focuses on theory but it cannot solve teachers’ actual problems. As a result, teachers are frustrated. Thirdly, there is a shortage of funds. Fourthly, teacher training is widespread and frequent, but not effective. The effectiveness and pertinence remain to be improved. Fifthly, even if teachers desire to be trained, they are too busy to take a leave from their teaching responsibility (Chen & Sude, 2005).

We find through interviews that the rigid implementation of policy has become seriously restrictive. Dai students in Fengping School account for 90% of all the students. In this area, ethnic minority education lagged behind for a long time (Meng, 2007, pp. 121–127). However, the school has to be evaluated by the same standards

with other general schools. It is difficult to embody the particularity of schools for ethnic minorities. There are confusions and conflicts between the particularity of ethnic minority and the universality of education evaluation (Wang & Guan, 2010).

4.4.5 New Curriculum Reforms

Research has shown that the problem of rigid implementation is very serious in the New Curriculum Reforms. The existing curriculum provision and training patterns are designed based on the conditions and teachers' quality of urban and developed areas, which is not suitable for teachers in impoverished and ethnic areas. There are conflicts between the universal education policies and ethnic minorities' particularities (Chen & Li, 2010). There is also a gap between teachers' understanding of the new curriculum concept and their teaching practices. Actually, many teachers cannot adjust to the new teaching materials and new teaching methods. It is very difficult to make them adapt. The New Curriculum Reform and related trainings are not geared toward local circumstances. It is just lip service, unfulfilled and not effective enough. The policy of the New Curriculum Reform has not achieved its expected goals (Bao, 2009, pp. 121–126). In addition, the trainers are not qualified; their training methods are simple and/or impractical, so the effect of the trainings is not satisfying.

4.5 Countermeasures and Recommendations

4.5.1 Implementing Education Policies for Ethnic Minorities with Full Consideration of Their Particularities

In implementing the related education policies, the particularities of certain ethnic groups should be fully considered. Local needs should be an important factor for decision-making. Through thorough research, governments at all levels should divide these areas into certain levels and types by taking into consideration the differences in geography, ethnic composition, languages, cultures, etc. (Cui, 2010).

4.5.2 Clarifying Relationships to Avoid Conflicts Between Departments

The designing and implementation of education policies for ethnic minorities involve various departments on different levels. Different Education Bureaus, the ethnic affairs commission, departments of finance and local governments are all involved. Different departments establish and implement policies based on their own views,

which is common in the administrative system. Therefore, we must clearly define the responsibilities and authority of every department in the implementation of education policies for ethnic minorities to avoid conflicts and burdensome administration (Ding, 2005).

4.5.3 Improving Training for Decision-Makers to Develop Cultural Sensitiveness

In education policies for ethnic minorities, the policy goals of the central government tend to be flexible and leave space for local governments. Under these circumstances, the interpretation of policies in local governments plays a decisive role in the implementation. The implementers do not take part in the research process of policy-making and their understanding of the policies is not systematic and integral. Sometimes, they even misunderstand the policies (Jin, 2009a, pp. 71–88). Therefore, to improve the education of ethnic minorities and their cultural sensitivity, improving decision-makers' ability to make culturally sensitive education policies, but also improving implementers' ability to carry out these education policies should be the priorities (Gui & Zhong, 2010).

4.5.4 Delegating Administrative Autonomy to Lower Levels

Governments at all levels and related functional departments should grant education administrative departments and schools necessary autonomy in school management. Only through this can administrators and/or headmasters make appropriate decisions to meet the actual needs (Li, 2005, pp. 132–137).

4.5.5 Establishing a Concrete Strategy to Help Teachers with Professional Development

Due to the lack of training funding, teachers' knowledge and ability are yet to be improved. Administrative departments should make specific and scientific plans for teachers' professional development and allocate more funds for teacher training. The government should take measures to develop teacher education, encourage teachers to engage in teaching permanently, and offer opportunities for their professional development (Gui & Zhong, 2010).

4.5.6 Arranging Classes Based on Local Ethnic Characteristics in Line with Students' Actual Needs

Based on students' needs, curriculum reforms should be implemented. Some classes with unique ethnic characteristics should constitute an important part of the curriculum. It will not only arouse students' interests in their own ethnic culture, but also improve their cultural sensitivity (Jin, 2009b).

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