



A Comparison and Research on the Sino-U.S Bilingual Education

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Abstract

With the coming of era of global economic integration and knowledge economy, China is increasingly opening its door to the outside world and actively making connection with international society. Under such circumstance, the Chinese education, especially higher learning education will certainly has a very close connection and interaction with the international education system, and this also means that Chinese higher learning education system will face the new challenge of how to train Chinese students to handle the international competition with bilingual ability. Therefore, it will be helpful for us to have a comparison and research on the bilingual education in China and the United States.

Keywords: Bilingual education, Bilingual ability, Sino-U.S Students

1. Introduction

Today, there are lots of things in common for China and the U. S. to have similar purposes in providing bilingual education for their students respectively. However, The Americans look at bilingual education as a remedy of language education for those ethnic students so as to make them to enter into so-called main stream education as soon as possible. In American colleges and universities they provide monolingual instruction only. But for most Chinese they treat bilingual education as a means for what they want get for better and more in future, and are promoting bilingual education in all colleges and universities today. The efficiency of China's collegiate bilingual instruction is under debating, and the relevant research work on it should be done before we learn how bilingual education may be usefully and efficiently provided to different people with various educational needs. bilingual education seeks to develop a foundation of a purposeful, productive, and fulfilling life and a just, compassionate, and flourishing society. This study was taken in view of the growing importance of bilingual education in China and United States. Significant differences and similarities were found in mechanism and perceptions about bilingual education in these two countries. The underlying reasons that may account for such differences are discussed extensively.

With only about two hundreds of years in establishing its state, the United States is quickly developing into a modern country, becoming today's super power and playing an increasingly important role in the world's historical course of development. We know that there are many reasons for why the American society is growing so quickly in a variety of ways, but the one important reason we are sure of is its bilingual education. What is the characteristic of America's bilingual education compared with China's one? How does it make so much of achievement in this matter? As an integral part of modern education, bilingual education has been vested with a fully new meaning in 21 century when China is sparing no efforts in pushing for economic, political and social reform, and modern science and technology is playing decisive roles in the social progress and economic development. Compared with the bilingual education practiced in United States, China's bilingual education is quite later in its development, and therefore, needs to learn to borrow America's beneficial experiences in its development and cultivation of bilingual education mechanism. America is a superpower of science and technology and education in the world. American government has always attached primary importance to developing and improving bilingual education mechanism, and established a complete set of nationwide bilingual education mechanism. It is meaningful for us to make a comparison and research on the current situation and mechanism of Sino-U.S bilingual education

Bilingual people can range from one who is indistinguishable from a native speaker in both languages at one end to the person who has just begun to acquire a second language at the other end. A bilingual's degree of bilingualism can be

assessed in the four skills of listening comprehension, speaking, reading comprehension and writing. Bilingualism simply means having two languages and they are all bilinguals but possessing different degrees of bilingualism. A monolingual person is, however, someone who knows only one language. There are many possible combinations of abilities in these skills. Someone who is bilingual in all four skills would be classified as a receiving oral bilingual. Many children of immigrants possess all four skills solely in the official language of their country, while may be able to understand only the spoken form of their mother tongue and barely be able to speak it, since they are bilingual only in receiving the spoken form of two languages, in listening comprehension. Within each skill there could be differing abilities in each language, for example, an English Chinese bilingual educated through English could be much more proficient at writing English than Chinese, while his spoken Chinese could be better than his spoken English.

2. Bilingual education in China's Colleges and Universities

The global economy integration and international relations has revitalized bilingual education in China. As a new member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), China is trying to take advantage of this opportunity to meet the challenges. Foreign language and cultural differences are viewed as two major barriers for effective communication with outside world, especially English-speaking world. Bilingual education is training those people who wish to be able to command English for worldwide business and communication. For them, bilingual education is a ladder in the society, a useful tool, and a pass to the better outside world. First, it is a result of the English dominance in the area of international communication. As English serves as a kind of "global language" in the current global communication, it is natural for China, a country that strives for a better national image in the international arena, to train its students who can work in both English-speaking and Chinese-speaking countries.

In some sense, Bilingual education means teaching lessons in English. The bilingual teachers must have expertise in his or her field of subjects, and must be fluent in English. It requires that the bilingual teachers should have both rich professional knowledge and a good English foundation, which, strictly speaking, is unavailable in many universities today in China, not mention middle schools or primary school. Currently, there is a developing trend in China's colleges and universities to provide bilingual education in various fields, especially in business management, finance, political science, natural sciences, and engineering. The issue about how to establish the curriculum of bilingual education and how to evaluate it has no answer so far. The teaching method, the feature, the mode and the environment of bilingual education is under experiment and discussion. These types of courses are different from college English that focuses on language learning only. There are two purposes, the first one of which is to empower China's college students to get advanced sciences and technologies directly from the outside world with a foreign language, and the second one is to help them to develop bilingual language skills for efficient worldwide communication. It is clear that the utilitarian nature of China's collegiate bilingual education is highly dependent on the qualifications of the faculty and the capacity of the students. The guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education of China stipulates that schools are encouraged to adopt authentic English textbooks published in such countries as the United States and other English-speaking countries where sciences and technologies are much more advanced. Many colleges and universities require that, if it is a class taught in English, any explanation written on the chalkboard must also be in English. It is encouraged to have all coursework done in English including teaching, writing on board, exercises, and examinations. This indicates that China's collegiate bilingual education is a mixture of immersion of English learning and transitional English study approach. Those students who have a limited English proficiency make them feel difficult to comprehend proper academic contents of their field. Lots of problems are reported on its feasibility, effectiveness, necessity. The linguistic environment on Chinese colleges and universities does not naturally favor the use of a foreign language as a means of communication, while the attitude of utilitarian towards English study restrains, more or less, many Chinese students to fully understand and appreciate the cultures which may make them interested.

3. Lack of Teaching and Learning Environment for bilingual education

To successfully carry out efficient bilingual teaching in a Chinese context, it is extremely important to create a good bilingual teaching and learning environment, in which teachers and students should be both bilingual. However, the fact is that English-speaking instructors know no subject of their subjects. This makes it difficult to create an effective bilingual teaching and learning environment in that the Chinese students who are not yet proficient in English cannot fully understand the lectures, let alone speak and write well in English, while bilingual teachers can feel very frustrated as students may literally translate from Chinese into English. It is helpful for us to know the differences in bilingual education between China and the United States. Most American bilingual teachings are for limited English proficient children, and have depended upon local government efforts, while in China, bilingual teachings in colleges and universities are fully funded by the central government. The U. S. government pushes Americans to learn foreign languages such as Chinese, Arabian, and Japanese as national long-term goal in education policy. In a number of school districts, Two-Way bilingual education programs at the middle school and elementary school level become the favorite where parents have the vision of future benefits for their children and schools have the ability to provide bilingual education. They are expected to become competent enough to use bilingual language for either academic work or social

life. For these kinds of teaching programs, students are from monolingual families, non-English speaking families or English-speaking families.

4. Lack of Updated Teaching Materials and Resources

Teaching materials for bilingual education always have to be updated for effective teaching. However, Few English periodicals, newspapers and academic journals are available on most Chinese colleges and universities, and most bilingual teaching programs in China lack effective access to updated teaching materials from English-speaking countries. On one hand, The Chinese college students could hardly afford to buy textbooks edited in English, and on the other hand, new textbooks are often not available. Therefore, bilingual instructors are often restrained in finding latest materials for their teaching and research, which obstruct their teaching quality and their research activities

5. Lack of Qualified Teaching Faculty

When China decided to carry out so-called market economy, it became more and more difficult for Chinese school authorities to keep the already limited number of bilingual instructors on campus because they are free to resign their teaching jobs and go to somewhere else where they can find much better-paid jobs. Furthermore, bilingual instructors need to be “retrained” from time to time at a foreign university to update their professional knowledge about latest development of their field of subjects. The heavy teaching load and universal lack of funding make it difficult to organize this kind of retraining at bilingual training programs in China, which, to some degree, can make qualified bilingual teachers today unqualified tomorrow. In contrast, American governments have strict regulations on bilingual teacher qualification. The priorities in people’s education may have to be different as we are from different economic, educational, and linguistic backgrounds. There is no reason to seek international standards in bilingual education that combine with cultural values, personal preferences, social needs, and public choices. We should be aware that there are no models, such as American Two-Way or Canadian Immersion approaches, that are perfect enough for the Chinese to copy.

We may agree that bilingual ability is a life asset for any people who have it. However, does bilingual education suit anybody? It is too early to say how bilingual education should be provided to people who have different language and schooling needs.

6. Contributing factors of development of Sino-U.S bilingual education

6.1 The change of U.S demographic structure leads to the new need for bilingual education.

With more and more immigrants moving to America since 1960s, the size of immigrant population has got huge expansion. However, as the minority group, they do not quite understand American language and culture because of their lower educational level. That made them feel it needed to receive bilingual education for the different groups of people who are attending bilingual school, and most of them are from various groups of immigrants who are naturalized as American citizens. They have very strong desire for learning to survive a new life environment. Meanwhile, the American social and economic development itself needs to transform them, a huge labor force, into human resources to help contribute to its further development. To do so needs American government to provide bilingual education for them, including adult education, vocational technical education, long-distance correspondence education, community college education, T.V university long-distance education and so on.

6.2 The economic competition in the world makes bilingual education an objective necessity.

Education has been regarded by American government as one of the best means to enhance labor productivities. For more and more Americans today, old and young, male and female, the continuous learning in their lives has increasingly become an agreed-on social value as well as a shortcut in their efforts to make success. It has always been advocated by the American society to achieve success through personal hard work and study. To enhance the global competitive power of American economy has always been the main purpose of American educational policy. With the advent of global economic integration and knowledge economy, how to make American original structure of labor productive technology and knowledge fit for the global economic competition has become increasingly urgent for American government to find a solution. All this means that a great amount of labor forces are to be reeducated and retrained for the new knowledge and new skills by means of education. Bilingual education is a kind of learning skill of American society. Therefore, it has not merely become a means to make a living in modern society, what is more, has become what they can count on in realization of their dream of life. The traditional one-time education method can no longer meet what they desire to make their dream for personal success come true.

When making a comparison between China and America for the above-mentioned contributing factors of bilingual education, we can see that while they have something in common there is something different in degree and in kind.

With the development of China’s economy and society, especially with the conceptual and ideological change of Chinese people, the idea of bilingual education has been gradually accepted by more and more of people, especially young students in schools. The economic tide of globalization has without any exception got China involved in the

international economic competition. This type of competition, putting it in other words, is in fact a competition for education and for talent people with higher degree of education. Bilingual education is an advanced learning idea. However, the old traditional idea of “education for one-time, useful for all one’s life” is still prevailing in today’s educational market, comparatively speaking, Chinese educational idea is still predominated by an orthodox idea, which takes education just a means for obtainment of diploma and degree, and make it very difficult to thoroughly popularize the idea of bilingual education. In contrast, Chinese government fails to make an overall plan in mapping out the policy of developing bilingual education, especially fails to establish a long-term bilingual education policy with concrete workable measures, and make it has great bearing on the long-term healthy development of bilingual education to guarantee the bilingual education mechanism as well as the enforcement of bilingual education policy.

In terms of Chinese education system, teachers decide students’ future in school and influence students’ lifetime to some extent. Chinese teachers are expected to play the role of not only teaching responsibility but also example of morality, which means that Chinese teachers needs to be concerned about students’ academic performance, take care of students’ daily life and safety, focus on students’ ideological idea and plan students’ lifetime goals after graduation. Under the background of Chinese traditional culture, the Chinese teachers not only need to teach students but also need to “foster” students. That is why the good relationship between teacher and student is often dubbed as “relationship as good as father and son” or “relationship as good as mother and daughter”. In some sense, the roles played by Chinese teacher is the overlapping roles of both teacher and parent, and idea of “respecting teacher as sage” is the common attribute for most of Chinese students and teachers. In contrast, what the American teachers do for their students in some more sense is to offer help and suggestions which usually focus on where teachers and students have common concerns and interests. They seldom go beyond the limits of working relationship between teacher and student to mold students in accordance with their own model of idea.

7. The Sino-U.S bilingual education strategy of development

American government has drawn up a series of flexible education measures and plans and developed a set of standing effective mechanisms of bilingual education, which is characteristic of richness in contents, completeness in structure, and variety in forms.

7.1 Allowing full play to development of bilingual education.

In American education and culture, the function of teachers is to help their students to make a self-realization and to gain knowledge and skills in their studying process. American teachers combine self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a "capacity for connectedness." The American school does this by becoming a moral community that helps students form caring attachments to adults and to each other. The American government spares no efforts to intensify its financial support and policy support in promotion of bilingual education, and always takes it seriously that bilingual education is a systematic social project and needs various social organizations and industrial and commercial enterprises to get involved to support bilingual education. The U.S government financial assistance also includes the bilingual education scholarship, non-interest student loans, and subsidies of study. It stipulates that all social organizations and industrial and commercial enterprises can enjoy the preferential educational policy, the reduction of education taxation and non-interest financial assistance provided by three levels of governments on condition that they take part in opening and managing bilingual education.

The American school itself embodies a good character. The daily life of classrooms as well as all other parts of the school environment is imbued with core values such as concern and respect for others, responsibility, kindness, and fairness. It progresses towards becoming a microcosm of the civil, caring, and society we seek to create as a nation. All students have a need to belong, and they are more likely to internalize the values and expectations of groups that meet this need. American teachers would not get involved in helping design life future for students, but rather, they would play the roles of mentor of students – giving attention to students’ daily learning problems, and offering their help and suggestions. These caring relationships will foster both the desire to learn and the desire to be a good person. They are able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves. The methods used by them vary widely: lectures, collaborative problem-solving. The connections made by American teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts -- the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self.

7.2 Government’s management and research for bilingual education

The American government specifically drew up a series of policies and plans for bilingual education as the subject of priority for development and research. The plan also lists some problems which are related with bilingual education and need to be resolved. The American government takes Bilingual education both as a social systematic project and a complicated educational systematic project, and, therefore, reinforces its macroscopic regulation and supervision for bilingual education, the purpose of which is to allow full play to the initiative of local social organizations in

development of character education, and in the meantime, to reduce the blindness of people's engagement in education. The mechanism of management and research in Chinese bilingual education remains much rooms for improvement. The development of bilingual education not only needs the support from policy and law but also needs financial support from government. The participation of Chinese social organizations in the bilingual education is far from achieving the social effects as a whole, and much of efforts in developing bilingual education have still been made by Chinese government alone, which is very difficult to accomplish the task of constructing a relatively perfect mechanism of bilingual education. It is because there have been so far no specific policy for bilingual education that Chinese government is not likely to financially support bilingual education as the U.S government does. The first step of management mechanism is to set up and improve the system of educational assessment, which is a key link to verify and guarantee the quality of bilingual education. Secondly, the Chinese government needs to establish a set of complete national scientific system of assessment for bilingual education in order to promote the orderly and healthy development of it.

8. Conclusion

With China entering an intellect-based economic era today, the bilingual education has been taken as an important education policy to revitalize China by virtue of education and science. The importance of bilingual education has gone beyond the significance of education itself both in terms of its theory and in terms of its practice. Chinese education is centered on the book knowledge with academic examination as its major focus, which is not instrumental to the cultivation of creative capability. bilingual education takes deliberate steps to cultivate intellectual virtues through every phase of school life—the relationships among peers, the content of the curriculum, the process of instruction, the rigor of academic standards, the environment of the school, the conduct of extracurricular activities, and the involvement of parents. Educational systems today are focused on raising standards of academic achievement. However, as we consider the world in which we live, we understand the importance of helping students to learn much more than the subjects they study. Appropriate environments, activities, the arts, and service projects can help students to learn responsibility, compassion, integrity, civility, leadership and cooperation. These and other elements of healthy, well-developed education system can be learned by example and opportunity to exercise them. Everything that happens in the life of the school is instructive, because everything affects the healthy growth of students. It will be advisable for us to learn and make a research into America's bilingual education, for there exist great differences between two countries on either teaching idea of education or teaching mode. The American bilingual education system has a lot of useful practices for us to borrow and learn. The different cultural tradition of America and China affects two countries' ideas and concepts of bilingual education. We hope that Chinese bilingual education will get much improvement by drawing on the beneficial experiences of American bilingual education system.

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