

The Study of the Teaching Models and Prospects of Bilingual Teaching in Local Universities of China - A Case Study of Leshan Normal University, Sichuan

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Abstract

In present China, bilingual teaching, as an education model, can meet an urgent demand for increasing interdisciplinary talents who have high levels of professional knowledge as well as competent foreign language abilities to deal with the ever-increasing global social, economic, scientific and technological exchanges, and international cooperation. Bilingual teaching is now developing fast in many local universities in China. However, the result is far from satisfaction. Inappropriate teaching strategies, learning materials as well as insufficient qualified bilingual teachers bring about the students' lack of learning motivation, and thus to hamper the development of bilingual teaching. It is hoped that this paper can enrich the knowledge of bilingual teaching in local universities of China and provide useful and valuable information for students and teachers who are interested in this field. At the same time, it also provides a useful guidance for the future bilingual teaching practitioners.

Keywords: the teaching models, prospects, bilingual teaching, local universities of China

1. Definitions of Bilingual Teaching

Bilingual education is a component inside a wider social, economic, cultural and political framework so there will be different understandings of bilingual education and various models derived from the practice in different countries (Baker, 2001:150). Bilingual teaching is one kind of teaching activities taking two languages as its medium, but its definition varies from countries to countries and from areas to areas. In international context, there are already some widely-accepted definitions of bilingual education. Presently, the most authoritative definition of bilingual teaching is "the use of a second or foreign language in school for the teaching of content subjects", defined in Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1998).

Specifically in China, bilingual teaching is a kind of educational model that a second language (mainly English) is totally or partially used as an educational medium in class to teach nonlinguistic subjects. The final goal is to enable the students to communicate and think in both Chinese and English, and to master the target subjects.

2. Models of Bilingual Teaching in Foreign Countries

Because of the diverse cultural background among countries, bilingual teaching are diversified in its concept, standard, objective, strategy, procedure as well as model. It is widely acknowledged that bilingual teaching models are divided into ten types by Baker (1993: 152). Due to the limit of this paper, the author only presents four popular models that are still widely-used in foreign countries: the transitional bilingual education model, the two-way bilingual education model, the immersion bilingual education model, and the maintenance bilingual education model.

2.1 Transitional Bilingual Education Model

Basically, transitional bilingual education model refers to the partial or total use of the child's home language when the child enters school and later change to the use of the school language only (Stern, 1999). The basic goal of transitional bilingual education model is to assimilate minority language students into mainstream education (Baker, 2006). Specifically in China, the aim of transitional bilingual education is to help transition a student into an English-only classroom as fast as possible. A bilingual teacher instructs children in subjects like

science, math and social studies in their native language, so that once the transition is made to an English-only classroom, the student has the knowledge necessary to compete with his classmates in all other subject areas. Research has shown that many of the skills learned in the native language can be transferred easily to the second language later.

2.2 Two-way Bilingual Education Model

Cummins (2000) states that two-way bilingual education model begins in the US and is becoming increasingly popular. According to Baker (2001), in a typical two-way bilingual education model, students improve proficiency in 2 languages by learning instructions in a majority and a minority language respectively, with the more or less equal use of both languages for an extended period of time in a classroom which includes half native speakers and half target language speakers. Two-way bilingual education places two language groups together and promotes the learning of a second language while maintaining the home language. The two-way bilingual education model promotes academic achievement and language proficiency in two languages for both language majority and language minority students in the same classroom; it has generated considerable interest in the United States.

2.3 Immersion Bilingual Education Model

According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1998), the immersion bilingual education model is to use a single school language, which is not the child's mother tongue. Some scholars classified the immersion model into total immersion bilingual model and partial immersion bilingual model, according to the proportion of the second language or foreign language. As a new type of second language education, immersion bilingual education stems from a model of bilingual education in Canada, especially in the province of Quebec. After many years of teaching practice in Canada, this successful bilingual education model is proved to be effective and has been more widely recognized by the world's bilingual community. Students learn science knowledge with a second language and also gain comprehensive development in the learning process.

2.4 Maintenance Bilingual Education Model

According to Baker (2002: 192), the essence of maintenance bilingual education model is to educate the language minority students through both their minority language and the majority language. According to Dicker (2003), in a maintenance bilingual education model, also known as heritage language bilingual education for minority language children, the heritage, native, or home language of minority language children is used as a medium of instruction for most, or at least half of the curriculum time and studied as a subject simultaneously. Maintenance bilingual model differ greatly from other models in both outcomes and goals. In maintenance model, the learners are transitioned into English content classes, and are given support in their first language, as in transitional programs. But they also receive language arts in their native language, enabling them to become literate in that language, and they continue to receive content area classes in their first language as well, so that they become literate in both languages. The goal of maintenance bilingual model is to promote bilingualism and biliteracy; rather than an assimilationist goal, this model promotes pluralism.

3. Models of Bilingual Teaching in China

Because of the various conditions in different regions, and due to the different levels of English competence in different regions, it is unlikely to adopt the unified bilingual teaching model all over the country. And one thing needs to be pointed out is that bilingual teaching models cannot follow the models of foreign countries due to lack of bilingual environment.

In domestic researches, some researchers have summarized the bilingual teaching models in China. According to Zhang Weijia (2002), there are 3 types of Chinese bilingual teaching, for instance, the maintenance bilingual education model, the transitional bilingual education model, and the immersion bilingual education model. But some other experts hold different views and are strongly convinced that the present bilingual teaching models falls into 3 categories: (1) the Semi-English model using the authentic textbooks as well as but Chinese instruction; (2) the Mixed model using the authentic textbooks and the half-Chinese and half-English instruction; (3) the English-only model using the authentic textbooks and English-only instruction. (Guo Mengqiu, 2007) According to Yu Liming and Han Jianxia (2003), bilingual teaching in China should use the content-based teaching model. What's more, more concrete and effective models are advocated by other scholars such as the progressive model and the soakage model.

To sum up, the mature bilingual teaching models in China are few because of being limited by many factors and conditions.

4. A Case Study of Bilingual Teaching in Leshan Normal University

This case study was to display the current situation of bilingual teaching in Leshan Normal University, Sichuan Province, China. In the process of the case study, the author used questionnaires, observations and interviews for data collection, and then analyzed the findings from the case study. By this case study, the author was to find the answers to the following questions:

- (1) What are the teachers' and students' attitudes towards bilingual teaching?
- (2) What are the students' English levels and the teachers' English competence?
- (3) What is the management of bilingual teaching and the teaching assessment?
- (4) What affects the implementation of bilingual teaching in the local universities of China?

4.1 Subjects of the Case Study

The subjects getting involved in the questionnaires of the case study were 250 students who come from the different schools of the university: the School of Computer, the School of Music, the School of Electronics and Information, as well as the School of Economics, among whom 10 students were chosen at random to be interviewed afterwards. Meanwhile, 8 teachers from these 4 schools were interviewed. Among them, 2 teachers come from the School of Computer, 2 teachers are from the School of Music, 2 teachers are from the School of Electronics and Information and the other 2 are from the School of Economics.

4.2 Methods of the Case Study

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The case study used a close-ended questionnaire, which was mainly divided into 3 parts:

- (1) Basic conditions (such as students' English level, the curriculum design, the materials used in class, etc.) of bilingual teaching in Leshan Normal University;
- (2) Students' and teachers' respective attitudes towards bilingual teaching in Leshan Normal University;
- (3) The evaluation criterion of bilingual teaching in Leshan Normal University.

Besides, each part consists of some specific items according to different majors of the students and the teachers. 280 handouts were sent to the School of Computer, the School of Music, the School of Electronics and Information, as well as the School of Economics. And 250 valid questionnaires were collected.

4.2.2 Classroom Teaching Observation

In the case study, the author made a careful observation of bilingual classroom teaching in 4 classes of the School of Computer, the School of Music, the School of Electronics and Information, as well as the School of Economics, making recordings with a video tape recorder of the whole process in the class including the teachers' teaching, the students' learning as well as the interaction between teachers and students. The observation was carried out with the purpose of getting the whole picture of the current situation of the bilingual courses in local universities of China, which mainly concerns the teaching strategies, teaching models, teaching materials, students' performances and classroom interactions, and so on.

4.2.3 Interview

In the case study, the author interviewed both teachers and students in the School of Computer, the School of Music, the School of Electronics and Information, as well as the School of Economics respectively. Before the interviews, the author had prepared some questions and topics. The interviews included 2 parts: the students' interview carried out right after the classroom observation mentioned above; and the teachers' interview done face to face at other appointed time. The goal of the interviews is to get a clue of the teachers' and students' attitudes, their opinions and their suggestions about the bilingual teaching. The author had prepared some topics and questions to discuss with students and teachers respectively. The questions and topics are as follows:

4.2.3.1 Questions for Students in the Interview

- (1) Why do you learn English in the first place?
- (2) Do you know the goal of carrying out bilingual teaching in universities?
- (3) Are you enthusiastic in bilingual teaching?
- (4) What is the biggest barrier you meet in the bilingual teaching?
- (5) What is your opinion and suggestions on bilingual teaching?

(6) What factors stimulate bilingual teaching? What factors affect its impact?

4.2.3.2 Questions for Teachers in the Interview

(1) What is the significance of bilingual teaching?

(2) In your bilingual teaching, what teaching methods and models have you used?

(3) In the process of bilingual teaching, what difficulties have you met?

(4) What factors affect bilingual teaching?

(5) What are your opinions and suggestions about bilingual teaching?

(6) In your opinion, what is the bottleneck of bilingual teaching in China?

4.3 Findings of the Case Study

Based on the analysis of the results from the case study with the questionnaires, the classroom observations and the interviews, the author draws a conclusion that bilingual teaching in Leshan Normal University is still in the beginning stage, even though it has been carried out for over 5 years. One thing that many teachers and students share in common is that bilingual teaching helps them a lot in English teaching and learning, but they have not been full-prepared for bilingual teaching because it needs comparatively higher English level and enriched academic knowledge. So, problems are obvious as follows:

(1) The case study shows a lack of a perfect system of bilingual teaching in the university. There is no perfect teaching syllabus, no standard to follow and no policy to guide. It shows that many schools in Leshan Normal University haven't attached great importance to bilingual teaching and their management is far from satisfaction.

(2) The case study finds that most students prefer that bilingual courses should be optional. But the schools arranged bilingual courses based on teacher's competence. Because of lack of qualified bilingual teachers, students have limited choice. However, if bilingual courses are made optional, new problems will occur because students' participation cannot be guaranteed. So, the schools and the university find it hard to make decisions.

(3) The case study finds that there is a lack of qualified bilingual teachers and students' language skills are poor.

(4) The case study finds that traditional teaching approaches are still adopted in bilingual courses. Students show no enthusiasm in class and they get few opportunities to communicate with teachers and peers.

Judging from what has been mentioned above, it is clear that many problems still exist in the practice of bilingual teaching in Leshan Normal University. Based on the case study, the author tries to put forward some suggested solutions to the problems.

(1) In bilingual teaching, the appropriate knowledge should be taught in accordance with the students' real level of English and comprehension ability. What's more, the teachers should encourage the students to read supplied materials, read newspapers, watch TV programs and films with original languages, so as to arouse their interests.

(2) In bilingual teaching, the teachers should concern more about the study of students' motivation before the design of the bilingual course. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) firmly advocate intrinsic orientations. Maslow (1970) claimed that intrinsic motivation is definitely superior to the extrinsic one. The investigation of Leshan Normal University finds that students are short of the intrinsic motivation. So, a crucial problem that needed to be studied carefully is how to stimulate students' passion for learning English and participating in the bilingual class. What's more, the teachers should spur students to communicate with each other in English and be patient to correct their mistakes in the class. Besides, the teachers should often give compliments to students who had done well in class or in the exams in order to raise their interests and confidences.

(3) In bilingual teaching, the teachers should provide enough comprehensible input for students. Krashen (1982) claimed that the input of language should neither be so far beyond students' reach, nor so close to their current stage. In this case, the comprehensive input in bilingual class should be taken into full account. The teachers should list out some difficult terms or contents in advance so that students can be familiar with the content of discussion and get well-prepared for it.

(4) In bilingual teaching, the teachers should trigger comprehensible output. According to the Output Hypothesis, Swain argues that language output may trigger students' potentials to think and to communicate in English and enables students to know his or her own real English level (Swain, 1995). Therefore, in bilingual class, teachers should provide more opportunities for students to use English to think and solve problems with a purpose to further arouse students' interest and passion for English.

5. The Prospects of Bilingual Teaching in Local Universities of China

So far, in almost all the colleges and universities of China, Chinese-English bilingual program has been carried out, which shows that bilingual teaching is of great importance and practical significance to the social and economic development. In China, bilingual teaching enjoys many favorable conditions, although the conditions of implementation of bilingual teaching are limited. In this paper, the author lists some favorable conditions and unfavorable conditions for bilingual teaching as follows:

5.1 Unfavorable Conditions

In China, bilingual teaching, which is a new teaching mode, definitely met many challenges from many aspects. In the case of Leshan Normal University, the following unfavorable conditions can offer food for thought for other local universities:

- (1) The favorable bilingual environment is still comparatively limited.
- (2) The progress in the study on models and theories of bilingual teaching in accordance with Chinese characteristics is still relatively slow.
- (3) The scientific management system to supervise the implementing of bilingual teaching and evaluate teaching quality is not perfect yet.
- (4) The understanding of the relationship among bilingual courses, EAP (English for academic Purpose) and EGP (English for general Purpose) is still relatively unclear.
- (5) Further studies should be carried out in the areas of bilingual course design, textbook compiling and the evaluation of courses, in order to guarantee quality teaching for students.
- (6) It still has a long way to go for the shift from teacher-centered approach to student-centered approach and the learning-centered approach.

To sum up, the unfavorable conditions mentioned above are far from complete. And one thing needs to be pointed out is that such difficulties and setbacks do not only exist in China, but also in other countries or areas as well.

5.2 Favorable Conditions

- (1) There is an international trend for globalization. Bilingual teaching meets the need of globalization. Recently, with rapid increase of international communication and the enhancing of reform and opening policy, China needs more and more talented people who master English well and possess specific skills. Nevertheless, the shortage of those talents has become the bottleneck of sustainable progress in Chinese economy. So, colleges and universities play a vital role in fostering the bilingual talents in order to meet the needs of society.
- (2) There are abundant relevant theories and models for teachers and students to make full use in bilingual teaching, such as the SLA theories and the four models mentioned above, etc.
- (3) There are favorable research findings of researchers home and abroad. Many experts and scholars are in favor of bilingual teaching. Bilingual teaching has positive impacts on target language. This hypothesis was proved by many empirical studies (Baker, 1996).
- (4) The Chinese government strongly advocates bilingual teaching as means of education reform by setting up related policies sustaining the development of bilingual teaching in colleges and universities.
- (5) More and more colleges and universities begin to focus on the fostering of qualified bilingual teachers, which will certainly benefit the implementation of bilingual teaching.
- (6) More and more countries and regions have focused on creating favorable bilingual environment. It is clear that language cannot separate from an environment. A favorable linguistic environment is a must for language acquisition and learning.

To sum up, the author holds that though facing many obstacles, bilingual teaching in Chinese colleges and universities will sustainably develop. The trend of globalization will definitely move on so that bilingual talents are urgently needed for long.

6. Conclusion

In this research paper, the author aimed at the study of related theories and models in the sphere of bilingual teaching and at the study of the current situation in bilingual teaching in local colleges and universities of China. The author tried to obtain first-hand information through classroom observations via questionnaires and interviews with teachers and students in Leshan Normal University as a case study.

The results of the case study found that it was similar to that of some other researchers' research carried out in some other universities. Namely, qualified bilingual teachers were few; some students even showed their indifference for bilingual teaching; the biggest bottleneck was teachers' English competence and students' English proficiency. What's more, the author analyzed the present challenges and problems, which accumulated valuable experience for the study of prospects of bilingual teaching in colleges and universities of China.

Based on the analysis of prospect of bilingual teaching, the author found both favorable conditions and unfavorable conditions in the implementation of bilingual teaching in China. The author maintains that we must make set up clear and feasible objective in the first place, establish a scientific and integrative bilingual teaching system and create a favorable bilingual environment. Only in this way can we obtain a sustainable development of bilingual teaching in China.

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