

Blended Bilingual Education Model in Chinese-Foreign Cooperatively-Run Programs in Higher Vocational Colleges With Foreign Language Other Than English as the Target Language

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Abstract

Bilingual teaching modules are commonly seen in Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run classes with English as the foreign language. In Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run classes with foreign languages other than English, blended bilingual education model is suggested with different bilingual education models applied in different courses and terms. This model may also face the challenges like comparatively high learning objectives and inefficient learners as well as limited bilingual teaching resources. To ensure its quality, both external and internal quality assurance schemes are suggested.

Keywords: blended bilingual education model, Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run program, higher vocational college, minority language

1. Introduction

As part of opening up, the scale of Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run education has been developing rapidly for the past few decades. According to official website of Ministry of Education of China, there are 48 Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run institutes and over a thousand programs in higher vocational colleges (up until March 26, 2022) (Note 1).

Bilingual teaching models are commonly seen in programs with English as the foreign language, partly because of the popularity of English learning in middle schools in China. However, the number of Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run programs with non-English-speaking countries has also been increasing significantly particularly after the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed. Data from official website of Ministry of Education of China shows that the numbers of Chinese-Korean, Chinese-Russian and Chinese-Japanese cooperatively-run institutes and programs in higher vocational colleges nationally are 99, 58 and 23 respectively. Since most students in Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run programs aim to continue their education in partner countries, to master the official language in these countries becomes necessary and consequently part of teaching objectives in such programs.

In addition to bilingual education models, there are also other mature theories regarding English learning which could be applied to other foreign languages learning, such as ESL and dual language programs.

2. Literature Review

In *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, bilingual education is defined as “the use of a second or foreign language in school for the teaching of content subjects” and of three types, “immersion programme”, “maintenance bilingual education” and “transitional bilingual education”. Bilingual education could be conducted in different ways and may bring about different problems. Cubillo and Manzanares (2017) propose to use storytelling as an effective didactic resource in primary science teaching. When exploring the implementation of English as a language of instruction in a bilingual school in a bilingual school in Indonesia, Mukminin et al. (2019) find that various factors such as teachers’ attitude and ability to use English, language policy, teaching materials, students’ English proficiency, curriculum, student assessment, and admission policy may affect whether the teaching could be successful or not.

As for the bilingual education in Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run institutes and programs, several Chinese researches have been published. Li and Feng (2009) make an empirical study in International Business School of Tianjin University of Technology, and get a new bilingual education model combining four modes of total foreign language teaching, semi foreign language, dependent and transitional, considering students' foreign language level and difficulty of the courses. Zheng (2009) discusses the immersion bilingual teaching model in Chinese-foreign undergraduate programs, and suggests setting clear objectives for bilingual education and improving the bilingual teaching quality of professional courses. Lu and Zhu (2013) study the cooperative programs with English as the foreign language and propose five types of teaching modes, like translation, extension, alternation, demonstration and cooperation. There are several researches regarding bilingual education in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs in higher vocational colleges as well. Ye Sheng (2015) studies the case of Zhejiang International Maritime College and suggests the teaching mode of "lectures by foreign teachers + tutorials by Chinese teachers", and after analyzing problems of present bilingual education in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs in higher vocational colleges, Chen Jin (2018) offers some suggestions on how to improve bilingual education, such as to increase number of technical courses in Chinese, attach more importance to students' dual certificate, offer more young teachers bilingual teaching training, assign students into different classes according to their English basis, as well as improve interest of the teaching and improve the teaching materials. Chen Xueyan and Wang Jihong (2017) analyze implementation problems of immersion bilingual teaching in Sino-foreign cooperation and suggest that the goal of bilingual teaching should be set clear and quality should be improved. So far, little attention has been paid to bilingual education for students learning foreign language other than English in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs in higher vocational colleges.

3. Bilingual Education Models

According to International Bureau of Education, UNESCO, bilingual education refers to a language policy in education under which two languages are used as mediums of instruction, and it could be divided into different models, among which the most common being the additive and subtractive models. The former aims to develop learners' literacy and communication in both languages while the later aims to develop learners' literacy and communication in the second language. (Note 2)

Bilingual education itself could be too broad a definition and has various ways of classifications. McCarty (2012) generally classifies bilingual education into weak forms and strong forms, the later of which is more widely accepted and could be further sorted into Immersion, Maintenance, Two-way or Dual Language, as well as Mainstream Bilingual. Roberts (1995) classifies bilingual education into different models, including Submersion, ESL Pullout, Transitional Bilingual Program, Maintenance Bilingual Education. Submersion refers to mainstreaming non-native English speaking students into regular English-speaking classrooms in US. In ESL Pullout model, which is seldom introduced by other researchers, refers to pulling students out of some classes and mainstreaming them into other classes so as to receive English as a second language. Transitional Bilingual Program, which is more often mentioned in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs, means providing content area support in the native language while teaching the student English. Finally, Maintenance Bilingual Education transition students into English content classes and at the same time offer students support in their native language, which results in students' literacy in both languages. There is also a comparatively less well-known model Two-way Bilingual model, which involves students of two different language backgrounds learning content courses in both languages in order to develop students' bilingualism and biliteracy. In this article, Longman classification will be mainly applied.

When it comes to Chinese-foreign cooperative programs, each bilingual model may have its own pros and cons and no set model would precisely cater to the needs of students in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs with zero basis of the target language.

First of all, immersion model may be effective but not so realistic a resolution for students with no target language basis in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs. On the one hand, immersion form provides students more exposure to the target language and students tend to get much better levels of functional proficiency in written and oral aspects of the target language than students in regular foreign language class with less instruction in foreign language every day, according to Lyster and Genesee (2012). On the other hand, Lyster and Genesee (2012) also find that students may experience short-time lags in literacy development and they may be less competent in many aspects of grammar. To make it worse, immersion model is more often used in younger students. Steve McCarty further classifies immersion into early immersion, which happens in pre-schools, middle immersion, which exists in midway through elementary school and finally, late immersion which starts around junior high school. None of the three types of immersion starts as late as college years. More importantly, immersion model may increase Chinese schools' running costs. For one thing, immersion model

generally indicates at least half of the subject-matter instruction being in foreign language and in total immersion, all instructions should be in foreign language. The most appropriate teachers of total immersion model would be native speakers of the target language, which exerts more pressure of teachers' cost to Chinese school runners. In addition, there are some required courses such as political education courses, which could most possibly be taught by Chinese teachers. If such courses should be transformed into immersion model, teachers' foreign language skills would be necessary. Considering the fact that most of teachers also take English as their second language in school years, only extremely few teachers would qualify for the bilingual education with minority language as the second language. Extra foreign language training for teachers would be quite necessary and may be another cost burden to Chinese schools.

Secondly, the emphasis of the most widely used model, maintenance model (Ye 2015), is not consistent with foreign language teaching goals of Chinese-foreign cooperative programs. Although maintenance model improves students' capability to learn a new language, it still seems not the best choice for students in Chinese-foreign programs in colleges. Tellez (2018) traces history of maintenance bilingual education back to "early exit bilingual program", which aims to shift students of minority language out of their native language instruction as early as possible and unfortunately leads to students' decrease of native language competence and undervalue of their native language. In such case, maintenance bilingual education is offered as an amendment to keep students' development of native language when learning the foreign language. However, since students enrolled in college programs are mostly grown-ups who do not easily wither in their native language, the focus of maintenance bilingual education, namely keeping students' development of native language, seems less important in such programs.

Finally, transitional bilingual model, also known as early-exit transitional bilingual education is neither a model applicable for students in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs in colleges. McCarty (2012) holds that transitional, as a bilingual education form aiming for assimilation, leads students to relative monolingualism, which does not correspond with Chinese-foreign cooperative program.

In general, none of the most commonly seen bilingual education models satisfies needs of Chinese-foreign cooperative programs. There are different reasons for this phenomenon. To start with, the teaching objectives of bilingual education and Chinese-foreign cooperative programs are totally different. Bilingual education has its origin in America and its initial purpose is to help minority language speakers fit in the new land, which explains why many of the bilingual education models aim for assimilation. Different from the dominant social goal of bilingual education, the foreign courses of Chinese-foreign cooperative programs aim to train students' foreign language skills and intercultural communication competence (Zeng 2015). Furthermore, the learning environment could be quite different. As bilingual education originally takes place where the dominant language coincides with the target language, which indicates a lot of informal learning chances for minority language speakers. However, students in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs spend most of their school time in China and they mainly learn foreign language in class. In addition, bilingual education primarily aims at minor learners in primary and middle schools and its learning activities do not completely fit for college students. Last but not least, the teaching staff is different as well. In bilingual education programs in America, the teachers are mostly native speakers of the target language and have the natural advantage. Nevertheless, most teachers in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs are not native speakers of the target language and to make it worse, many professional course teachers are also new learners of the target language.

All in all, no set bilingual education model satisfies the needs of Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run class in higher vocational colleges, not to mention students learning foreign language other than English. Consequently, it is necessary to analyze requirements and needs of Chinese-foreign cooperative program foreign courses and develop customized bilingual education model for them.

4. Challenges of Foreign Language Education in Cooperative Programs in Higher Vocational Colleges

Students in cooperative programs in higher vocational education with minority language as target language are usually faced with several challenges when having bilingual education. To begin with, the learning objective of foreign language course is comparatively high. This is because most students aim to continue their education in another country after graduation, and the learning objectives of foreign language courses would be to adjust students with future life as well as study in another country. This is already a demanding task for adult beginners of a new language, not to mention the fact that they need to achieve this goal within a short period of only 2-3 years. In addition, most students in higher vocational colleges are not very efficient learners, which could be seen from their performance in college entrance exam. Since in traditional ideas in China, education background is attached to great importance, universities with better chances to get more and better education become

consequently preferred choices for high school graduates rather than vocational colleges. Consequently, students enrolled in higher vocational colleges are relatively weaker in learning abilities. Furthermore, there are very few bilingual textbooks or teaching materials aiming for such students in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs. For students going to English-speaking countries, there are not only classic English language textbooks but also many kinds of textbooks for specialized courses in English, which is understandable given the fact that English being the most widely used language in the world. When it comes to teaching staff, there are usually very few teachers who are both qualified for foreign language courses other than English and professional courses.

5. Blended Bilingual Education Model

Each bilingual education model has its own advantages which could be applied to Chinese-foreign programs. Firstly, regarding the most feasible bilingual education model in Chinese-foreign programs, Zheng (2009) proposes immersion as Chinese-foreign programs share a lot in common with bilingual situation in Canada, where immersion model is developed. The greatest advantage of immersion, particularly full immersion model lies in its authenticity and intensity of the target language. When thrown into a complete foreign language environment, students will be “forced” to use the language. It is highly impossible to apply it thoroughly in all courses as immersion model indicates more cost burden to the program runners. Still, this model could be applied in some of the courses. Secondly, when it comes to maintenance model, the most commonly seen bilingual model in colleges in China (Wei 2020), even though its focus on maintaining students’ native language seems unnecessary, its idea of promoting students’ biliteracy and proficiency in both languages could add students’ advantage in their future job hunting. Lastly, transitional model may seem a lot easier for students as their native language will be used as a medium in class, which eases students’ burden and anxiety in learning a foreign language.

In order to make use of advantages of different bilingual models, teaching models may vary in different courses and phases of learning considering learning objectives, contents as well as difficulty of the courses. Recommended objectives, content and teaching methods of different courses in different terms are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Blended bilingual model in different courses and terms (2year+1year program in Software Engineering as an example)

terms	Types of courses	Learning objectives	Recommended bilingual model	Suggestions for the courses
1-2	Foreign Language (Beginners)	Get ready for daily life in the target country	immersion	
1	Introduction to professional courses	Get a glimpse of the profession and get ready for more in-depth professional courses	maintenance / transitional	Bilingual professional terms could be provided
2	Foreign Language (medium level)	Get ready for campus life and academic study in the target country	immersion and transitional	
2	Hands-on courses like basic computer skills	Master the skills	Immersion	Teachers’ instructions could be in total foreign language
2-3	Basic theoretical professional courses	Lay a solid foundation for further study	maintenance / transitional	
1-3	Unique courses in China, like Fine Traditional Chinese Culture, Chinese, Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics	For all-round development	no bilingual model is suggested	Part of Fine Traditional Chinese Culture could be bilingual.

3-4	Basic professional courses like Basic Programming, Database Application, Operating System	Master professional knowledge and skills	maintenance / transitional	All professional terms and part of teachers' instructions could be bilingual
3-4	Core professional courses like Object-Oriented Programming, Data Structure, Software Engineering	Master professional knowledge and skills	maintenance / transitional	Core courses may be taught by Chinese teachers and foreign teachers
3-4	Career-planning related courses	Get ready for future career	maintenance	Career guidance could aim at both countries

6. Quality Assurance of Bilingual Courses

The blended bilingual model may also meet some problems. Firstly, it is almost impossible to find a set of foreign language and professional course textbooks, since very specific objectives in each term are set, and this is a small market to most publishers. Secondly, such teaching model makes enormous demands on teachers both from China and the cooperative country. The ideal teachers would be those who had education in the cooperative country, and have both life experience and professional knowledge. Such qualified teachers are understandably few. Thirdly, comprehensive use of a variety of teaching methods is also a challenge for most teachers.

For these possible issues, possible measures could be taken to ensure the teaching quality. First, custom-made textbooks could be adapted from original textbooks introduced from the cooperative country by teachers in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs in higher vocational colleges accurately for the target students. Custom-made textbooks are necessary because neither most textbooks shared in universities and colleges nor original textbooks from the other country satisfy the needs of Chinese-foreign cooperative programs. The textbooks shared by universities and colleges in China are mainly subject-based and unfit for students in higher vocational colleges. Additionally, original textbooks from other countries would be beyond students with zero foreign language basis. As for the adapters of the custom-made textbooks, the best team would be teachers in these cooperative programs who know the students best. In order to ensure the quality of the textbooks, foreign language experts as well as foreign language teaching experts should also be invited to the team.

Second, Chinese professional teachers should be offered kinds of trainings, including professional knowledge, the target language knowledge as well language teaching skills. Since Chinese professional teachers would play a key role in the bilingual education and they are most likely lack of foreign language teaching experience, it's necessary to get professional teachers trained for bilingual education.

Third, in case overseas returnee teachers are unavailable, teachers should be provided short-term exchange, which will not only offer teachers first-hand life and learning experience in cooperative country but also more communication with teachers from cooperative country.

Potential problems bring necessity and importance of bilingual education quality assurance. Mazurkiewicz (2017) argues that the definition of "education quality" is constantly evolving, relying on the level and needs of social development. Meanwhile, Sudarajat (2021) and other authors hold that quality development components need to be considered include inputs, processes, learning outcomes and benefits of the results.

Various quality assurance schemes of education can be found in different countries. After analyzing quality assurance systems of higher education in eleven countries and areas, Bie Dunrong and four other authors (2018) find that higher education quality assurance system could be generally divided into internal and external quality assurance systems, which is constructed by the university itself and government or other social organizations respectively.

Even though Chinese-foreign cooperative education is something relatively new, there are already lots of researches on its quality assurance. Li and Zhao (2019) take the case of Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University and propose multi-factor quality assurance system for Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run schools. Guo and Li (2014) propose new perspectives of institution and culture concerning quality assurance of Chinese-foreign cooperative education.

With reference to how to build quality assurance scheme of bilingual education in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs, the suggestions are as follows. For the external quality assurance, related policies should be made regarding bilingual education in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs in higher vocational colleges. Although

quality assessment has been being carried out for years in Chinese-foreign programs in undergraduate programs, it has not been carried out in higher vocational colleges. The external assessment could involve not only education supervision department in China but also international authorities in education. The internal quality assurance scheme could be designed following such principles: 1. The internal quality assurance scheme should involve all participants of Chinese-foreign programs, including teaching staff, management as well as students. 2. Chinese college should take the main responsibility of the quality authentication of the programs. 3. Internal regulations should be adopted. 4. Education resources should be enriched, including staff training on foreign language as well as professional knowledge. 5. Dynamic notion of quality could be used as an endless improvement of bilingual education quality.

7. Discussion and Future Research

With the implement of “Road and Belt” Initiative, it is predictable that there will be more education cooperation between China and non-English-speaking countries and programs with foreign language other than English as the target language. In future research, this blended bilingual education model should be further refined with more detailed sub-schemes and more foreign language teaching methods could be applied.

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Notes

Note 1. Data from official website of Ministry of Education of China, <https://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/index/sort/1008>.

Note 2. International Bureau of Education, UNESCO. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/b/bilingual-education>.

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