

Universities of China and the Countermeasures

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ABSTRACT

Bilingual teaching is an important part of university's going global and educating multinational talents. It emphasizes the communication and interaction in classroom through a foreign language used in nonverbal majors and lessons. But nowadays, the significance of bilingual teaching in Chinese universities is not fully recognized. This paper, on the basis of questionnaire survey of three universities in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, investigates the present situation of the bilingual teaching in universities of China. The existing problems include: the purpose of bilingual teaching is not clearly and correctly understood; incentive mechanism has not yet been formed; lack of classroom interaction affects students' interest in learning; curriculum is unreasonable; bilingual teaching staff is scarce; a number of students can't catch up with the teacher in class due to their low English proficiency; teaching materials are inappropriate. Some suggestive countermeasures are put forward to help deal with the above problems in order to promote bilingual teaching in Chinese universities.

Keywords: universities, bilingual teaching, questionnaire survey, countermeasure

INTRODUCTION

Bilingual education is an effective measure to promote the internationalization and teaching reform of higher education. Bilingual teaching emphasizes the communication and interaction in classroom through a foreign language used in nonverbal majors and lessons, so that students can achieve the dual purposes of learning profession knowledge and foreign language skills. Therefore, bilingual teaching proposes higher requirements for teaching staff, selected teaching material, teaching methods, and students' ability of learning. Despite the progress made in bilingual teaching, universities still face a variety of problems and obstacles.

This paper aims to explore the good ideas and reasonable measures for the improvement of bilingual teaching based on questionnaires survey of three universities in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province.

We have designed two questionnaires, one for teachers, and the other for students. There are 25 questions in the questionnaire for teachers, and 30 questions in the one for students. The questions in both questionnaires involve different aspects concerning bilingual teaching such as level of teachers, level of students, teaching method, curriculum, and other factors.

70 copies of teacher questionnaire are distributed and 55 copies are recovered; the recovery rate is 78.6%. 200 copies of student questionnaire are distributed and 180 copies are recovered; the recovery rate is 90%. The universities where the questionnaire survey is made include the North-West University, the Xi'an University of Posts and Telecommunications, the Chang'an University which are three different types.

PRESENT SITUATION OF BILINGUAL TEACHING IN UNIVERSITIES

(1) The purpose of bilingual teaching is not clearly and correctly understood

According to the questionnaire survey, 36 percent of teachers and 45 percent of students think the purpose of bilingual curriculum is to enhance students' foreign language proficiency and ability. This shows that universities do not recognize the differences between bilingual teaching and foreign language teaching. Bilingual teaching, in the eyes of quite a lot of teachers and students, is no more than a process of lesson giving in which the teacher uses half

Chinese and half English to speak and to write on the blackboard. Thus, despite the increased foreign language proficiency of students, the real purpose of bilingual teaching is distorted.

(2) Incentive mechanism has not yet been formed

The survey shows that an effective and reasonable incentive mechanism for bilingual teaching has not been formed. In the three universities surveyed, the teacher's payment from bilingual teaching is calculated according to the proportion of foreign language (mostly English) used in classroom. The higher proportion corresponds to the higher remuneration a teacher obtains from bilingual teaching. Usually the final remuneration is the multiplication result of the basic salary for an ordinary course and a coefficient. For example, in the Xi'an University of Posts and Telecommunications, four different coefficients are being used: 1.25、1.50、1.75、2.0 which correspond respectively to 25%、50%、75%、90% of foreign language used in the content of teaching. Although the income from bilingual teaching is higher than that from giving ordinary courses, it still does not match the efforts made by teachers. Teachers complain the low gains from bilingual teaching considering the demanding requirements for bilingual teaching: lesson preparation requires access to a larger reference, consumes more time and energy.

Inadequate incentives have negatively affected teachers' enthusiasm and effectiveness of bilingual teaching.

(3) Lack of classroom interaction affects students' interest in learning

The survey shows that the classrooms of bilingual courses are almost teacher-centered, not student-centered. Teachers indoctrinate what they think should be taught to students, while students have no much interest in learning. In some cases, what teachers do in class is just reading and translating textbook materials, neglecting the interaction with and response of students. Surely, this poor teaching performance affects the quality and effect of bilingual education.

(4) Curriculum is unreasonable

Course selection is random. The questionnaire survey tells us that bilingual courses are randomly and unsystematically selected in the three universities, not depending on the students' real demand but on whether or not they have teaching staff with good English. They do not take into account the degree of difficulty of the chosen courses and the influence on the students. Therefore students are not satisfied with the bilingual curriculum.

(5) Bilingual teaching staff is scarce

In China, training system for bilingual teachers has not been constructed. Normal universities do not have majors of professional bilingual teaching, and even theoretical and practical lessons about bilingual teaching are not available. Teachers who voluntarily give bilingual courses have not got any training; their opportunities to go abroad to exchange with their foreign counterparts are also very few. So the scarcity of qualified bilingual teaching staff with professional strength and high proficiency of English language is a big problem. Most of the teachers giving bilingual courses are either strong in expertise but poor in English, or vice versa. From the survey result, we can conclude that the scarcity of qualified teachers is the major obstacle constraining the development of bilingual teaching.

(6) A number of students can't catch up with the teacher in class due to their low English proficiency

Although there are some students in class who are able to understand the teacher well and perform actively, to have good interactions with the teacher, most students feel hard to follow the teacher because of their relatively low English level. Some students even see bilingual courses a burden that they have to take.

(7) Teaching materials are inappropriate

From the survey we can say that both teachers and student are not satisfied with the teaching materials. Some teachers use original English textbooks, some use domestic textbooks compiled by Chinese scholars, some even use the handouts prepared by teachers themselves. All of these teaching materials have advantages and disadvantages. For example, the original English textbooks excel the other two types in content and structure, and

they also reflect the cutting edge of natural and social sciences. But they are expensive to buy and difficult to understand. In addition, it is very possible that the original materials do not match the syllabus and course requirements. While, the other two types of teaching materials are cheap to buy and easy to understand, but they are not worth compliments because of the rough content, limited depth and flawed language expressions, which may mislead the students in learning.

SUGGESTIVE COUNTERMEASURES TO SOLVE THE ABOVE PROBLEMS

The significance of bilingual teaching in Chinese universities is not fully recognized so far, therefore we need to firstly change our attitude before taking any measures to improve the present situation, regarding bilingual teaching as an import part of university's going global and educating multinational talents. Bilingual teaching is different from ordinary teaching because it requires more efforts and broader vision. So, encouraging and supportive policies should be carried out, providing the teachers with incentives to do better in the classroom.

(1) Establish an effective and fair incentive mechanism

Firstly, it is essential to constitute a committee for bilingual teaching. The committee should consist of experienced academic staff and a number of excellent administrative staff with some educational background overseas. The function of the committee is to evaluate the performance of teachers through random visits to the bilingual classrooms and discussion with and get feedback from students. Those who get high evaluation should be granted with material awards and honor as well, and given preferential policies in title promotion.

Secondly, raise teacher's remuneration for bilingual teaching. As mentioned earlier, although the income from bilingual teaching is higher than that from giving ordinary courses, it still does not match the efforts made by teachers and has more or less negatively affected teachers' enthusiasm and effectiveness of bilingual teaching. Therefore, raising the remuneration from bilingual teaching according to the actual situation should be taken into consideration.

(2) Improve and innovate teaching method and means

The bilingual classroom should be student-centered. Teachers can use flexible ways such as ask-and-answer interactions, presentations by the students, discussions within the students to inspire and motivate the latter to engage in what are taught and to express their views and opinions.

Innovative use of IT in teaching is also helpful to making class more effective and efficient. Multimedia courseware can not only save time in writing on blackboard, expand the amount of information of classroom teaching, but also increase students' interests in learning through visual and sound information.

(3) Optimize Curriculum of bilingual teaching

Given the present problems in the setting of bilingual courses, curriculum optimization is essential. Some courses which are not easy to learn for students even when they are given in Chinese do not necessarily have to be taught in a foreign language. For example, most of the theory-oriented professional courses are not suitable for bilingual teaching. While for some courses which, though profound in theory, reflect academic frontiers and latest research progress, the attempt of bilingual instruction should be encouraged.

Particularly, most of the optional courses in humanities and social sciences can be considered being given in English. Take my own example: I have been giving a bilingual course named Ecological Crisis Humankind Is Now Facing for several years, totally in the language of English and have got very good evaluations from both my colleagues and students. In a teachers-students exchange about teaching and learning coordinated by the academic division of my university, some students suggest that more courses like Ecological Crisis Humankind Is Now Facing should be created for them.

(4) Take graded teaching method

The levels of students' foreign language abilities are uneven. So, bilingual courses should be classified into different categories according to the levels of students' foreign language (mostly English, as mentioned earlier) proficiency. Proportion of the foreign language used by the teacher should depend on students' acceptance and comprehension abilities. If there is no difficulty for the students to understand the lesson, native language is then not necessary. For those whose English is relatively poor, proportion of the foreign language used by the teacher can be lower, such as 25% or 50%, according to the actual situation.

In addition, in terms of the time arrangement for bilingual courses, we suggest that the second or the third year be the appropriate time. After one or two years of studying, students in the second or the third year have, to some extent, laid the professional foundation for further learning, and their English level has also improved. On the contrary, first year students are not fully prepared in both professional knowledge and foreign language ability, while the fourth year students are not very likely to concentrate on class learning due to their preparation for graduation dissertation writing, and particularly, to their time spent in job seeking.

(5) Strengthening teaching staff

There are several ways to strengthen and enhance the ability of teachers for bilingual courses.

a. Organize training programs to improve teachers' English level.

Foreign teachers in Chinese universities are a valuable resource that can be used in the training of bilingual teachers.

b. Send bilingual teachers to Foreign Studies Universities to get English training.

c. Organize interschool seminars about bilingual teaching regularly. Teachers can exchange with and learn from one another and share good experiences in terms of bilingual teaching.

d. Encourage teachers to go abroad to exchange with their foreign counterparts. Through this way, the bilingual teachers' professional knowledge and foreign language can be improved.

e. Recruit teaching staff from abroad according to the need of disciplinary development.

(6) Select appropriate teaching materials

As mentioned earlier, the three types of teaching materials being used include original English textbooks, domestic textbooks compiled by Chinese scholars and handouts prepared by teachers themselves. Considering the advantages and disadvantages of each of the three types, we suggest that the selection of teaching materials should depend on the students' level of acceptance and comprehension. The best choice, we think, is the original English textbooks which are less expensive and are not too hard for students to understand. Domestic textbooks are also a choice if they are of high quality. As to the handouts prepared by teachers themselves, we suggest that they should be reviewed by the bilingual teaching committee before selected.

In short, bilingual teaching is a big challenge for Chinese universities. It proposes higher requirements for teaching staff, selected teaching material, teaching methods, and students' ability of learning. Therefore, it requires efforts from various aspects.