

Bilingualism and Multilingualism in International Teaching

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Abstract

The process of world economic integration is dramatically changing the spread and use of human languages, and at the same time has a profound impact on human linguistic diversity. In the last half century or so, bilingual and multilingual education has become an important part of the education system of some countries, and bilingual and multilingual education policies have become a hot topic of concern for all walks of life. In this paper, we take the background of international bilingual and multilingual education as a premise, further explore the laws of bilingual and multilingual education, and sort out and summarize the academic discussions on this topic.

Keywords: multilingual and bilingual education, language policy and status

1. Current Status of Research

1.1 Bilingual and Multilingual Education in China

Since ancient times, China has been a multi-ethnic country, with various famous ethnic groups living together in peace. The long history demonstrates the process of penetration and integration, and even collision and fission of various languages, thus providing linguists with rich historical materials. Modern China has fully entered into a bilingual its to multilingual society, although this phenomenon is still lacking in perfection. The achievements and developments in many different fields are easy to see that China is in the initial stage of a bilingual society. Taking Macao, China, as an example, Zhang (2016), analyzes the changes in the use of different languages in Macao before and after the handover and examines the development of the corresponding language

policies. Since Macao was once a Portuguese colony, Portuguese was given the legal status of official language in Macao. Prior to the reunification, the Portuguese government was linguistically hegemonic, adopting a "Portuguese-only" position and insisting on a policy of Portuguese language education, caring only for the development of a few government Portuguese schools and not for the teaching of languages in basic education, especially in the majority of private schools in Macao. After the return of Macao, for historical reasons, Chinese as an official language has lagged behind Portuguese by more than 150 years, and the official status of Chinese in the executive, judicial and legislative branches is far from that of Portuguese. The autonomy granted to schools by the government has affected the promotion of Mandarin to a certain extent, but at the same time Portuguese does not have to be a

compulsory subject in schools, thus ending the status quo of “Portuguese alone”.

By compiling and analyzing the data related to language issues from the 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 censuses published by the Statistics and Census Bureau of Macao, the results show that the number of speakers of two or more languages has continued to increase after the regression, and the number of people who do not know other languages or dialects has decreased significantly. The phenomenon of “Portuguese dominance” and “individual bilingualism” gradually disappeared; multiple languages and cultures coexist and develop together in harmony. It can be seen that linguistic diversity is a unique phenomenon in Macao society with the increasing trend of globalization, the number of people who speak more than two languages will continue to increase; the Macao government does not deprive Portuguese language and culture of their right to develop, but rather adopts a relatively scientific and reasonable language policy to promote the harmonious coexistence of multiple languages and cultures, and the intermingling and common development of multiple cultures.

Finally, Zhang (2016) reflect on Macao’s language policy and propose ways to promote the development of bilingual and multilingual education, such as: promoting the diversity of language teaching and learning, and enhancing the functional status of Portuguese in society. To clarify the concept of bilingualism and to train bilingual and multilingual talents. Strengthen the teaching of the mother tongue and make the best use of the “linguistic critical period” of children. Transforming linguistic resources into cultural and economic resources. It reflects the scholars’ vision of the future development of bilingual and multilingual education.

1.2 Bilingual and Multilingual Education in Foreign Countries

With the development of international exchange, bilingual education has become an important part of the education system in some countries, especially in multilingual and multicultural countries such as Singapore in Asia, Luxembourg in Europe, and Canada in America. Li (2003) have conducted a comparative study on the typical bilingual (multilingual) education in Singapore and Europe and America. Since one of the scientific foundations of bilingual

education is linguistics, linguistics is used as the analytical perspective in order to place the comparative study on a scientific basis and also in the broader context of international bilingual education, which helps us to further explore the laws of bilingual education and learn from the beneficial experiences of bilingual education.

The basic spirit of bilingual education in Singapore is that English is the medium of instruction and the mother tongue is the main language learning curriculum. The aim is for students to learn English to understand its practical value, and to learn their mother tongue to understand the cultural norms and values of each nation. Bilingual education is also specifically integrated with streaming education, with elementary schools having two levels: basic (grades 1-4) and orientation (grades 5-6). At the end of the fourth grade, a placement test is held and students enter the orientation phase, where they can choose to take one of three language streams of their choice. At the end of Year 6, students take a final examination and, if they pass, undergo a further stream in junior high school. However, in terms of the overall education in Singapore, the medium of education is predominantly English, and bilingual education in Singapore is heavily weighted towards English at the expense of the mother tongue, making it an unbalanced bilingual education.

European education, such as the trilingual education in Luxembourg and the “immersion” education in Canada, where children are initially educated in their mother/first/home language and then receive multilingual education, allows students to become proficient in both the language and the mother tongue.

(Rezepova, Torosyan, Stepanenko, & Guseynov, 2018) analyze the reasons for this from a linguistic perspective by looking at the differences in language education between Europe and Singapore. In European schools and the Luxembourg trilingual education system, children are initially educated in their mother tongue/home language/first language. In Singapore, on the other hand, most children are educated in English from the beginning, except for those whose home language is English, which is not their mother tongue. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the switch between home language and school language may have cognitive and academic advantages and disadvantages. Scholars cite two hypotheses

proposed by Cummins (1979): “first, that the two languages are interrelated and that proficiency in the second language is influenced by the level of proficiency achieved in the first language, in short, the interdependence of first and second language development”. Second, that is, for a child to be bilingual, he must acquire a minimum critical level of first language acquisition proficiency to avoid cognitive and academic disadvantage. Therefore, in the article, the scholars propose improvements in the form of remedial programs for children who struggle with language or the use of extended years to improve the academic performance of those children who are less proficient in the language.

In French immersion education in Canada, English-speaking children are quickly immersed in the French curriculum from the beginning of their schooling. They learn major subjects in French, talk, play and sing with each other in French, and do everything in French. In a natural, unconscious state, they think of French, they respond to French in a very natural way, and they speak French at school as naturally as they speak English at home, so naturally they become bilingual. In Singapore, however, learning a language as a language course only, often confined to the classroom and unavailable outside the classroom, can disconnect learners from the learning of this language structure, and the learner’s experience cannot be quickly related to the real world as expressed in that language, thus not contributing to language learning.

2. Commentary

The study of bilingualism and multilingualism in international education is an issue that cannot be ignored in the current historical conditions of intercultural communication. Bilingual and multilingual education at home and abroad is still being improved and developed, and scholars have analyzed the impact of bilingual and multilingual education on learners through the social context and teaching policies of different countries, and have suggested ways to improve educational policies to promote the quality of teaching and learning and the acquisition of language skills by learners. From the information searched so far in this project, although many scholars have researched the content of bilingual and multilingual education in various aspects and also suggested how to better develop language education, there are still

problems with bilingual and multilingual education in the current international environment, I believe that we should strengthen cultural exchange and language learning, infiltrate different cultures into language teaching, face the advantages that multilingualism can bring I believe that multilingualism can help students to learn other languages and to develop a more macroscopic view of the world, which will give them an advantage in the future global competition. The negative aspects of multilingualism should be addressed positively, and the internal and external supply and demand for each language should be scientifically considered, so that reasonable language policies can be developed to promote bilingual and multilingual education.

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