

Educational Decentralization: A Literature Review of Controversies of Chinese-English Bilingual Education in Mainland China

Chuyuan Xu

Xi'an Peihua College, 710199

Abstract: At present, educational decentralization has become a global phenomenon, which is different in forms leading to various results in different socio-economic contexts. "Driven by resource scarcity", China first ignited the educational decentralization as early as in 1985 by the central government and strengthened it in 1993 so as to relate education with economic reform so that it can promote the efficacy of school management. Since then, educational decentralization has become an important policy of educational reform in China. Different scholars express different stances toward Chinese-English bilingual education under the policy of educational decentralization. Some think educational decentralization is widely recognized as a way of strengthening the professionalism of teachers while others critique the conduct of bringing market values into education. From all these views, it can be concluded that all the implementations of bilingual education are double-edged and need critical examination.

The literature review will be outlined in four parts. In the first part, it will present some background information about educational decentralization and bilingual education in mainland China. The second part will discuss some viewpoints about the contributions and challenges in the process of conducting bilingual education. The third part will make a reflection on the challenges as mentioned above and draw some pedagogical implications of implementing Chinese-English bilingual education in mainland China under the policy of educational decentralization. The fourth part is the conclusion part which reviews the issues discussed in the paper and highlights some insights and implications.

Keywords: Educational decentralization; Bilingual education; Mainland China

1. Background Information

1.1 Educational Decentralization

Early during the 1980s, the concept of decentralization had been receiving growing attention in western countries. Mainland China is not an exception to this decentralization trend. Since 1985, many strategies have been developed to delegate the decision-making power of school affairs historically controlled by the central Ministry of education to local education departments and even to some special schools in the Chinese Mainland. And in 1993, this decentralization policy was strengthened to link education with economic reform, thereby improving the efficiency of school management. From then on, the decentralization of education has become an essential policy of China's education reform.

1.2 Chinese-English Bilingual Education

After the implementation of economic reform and the conduct of educational decentralization policy, Chinese-English bilingual education rose. In the past few decades, English learning has been regarded as the key to China's economic development and global participation. As English is taught as a school subject with limited opportunities to use English in real life, people are becoming more and more dissatisfied with the effectiveness of traditional English teaching. To solve this problem, a variety of initiatives have been taken, including English immersion courses and the use of English as a medium of instruction (MOE). Since Chinese is the teaching language stipulated by law, the educational initiative to use English as the teaching language is called "bilingual education" to emphasize that although the part of the instructional language is English, the standard Chinese is also used to be as another language of the

instructional medium, which can be permitted and tolerated by governments at any level.

1.3 Contributions and Challenges of Chinese-English Bilingual Education

For Chinese-English bilingual education, different scholars have divergent opinions on this. Some think that this educational system has a great impact on the efficacy of teaching and learning while others criticize the system as an 'obsession' with English.

2. Contributions

As Baker(2007) states, bilingual education provides an immersive foreign language learning environment. Bilingual education can create a good language environment for students to learn foreign languages. Additionally, Chinese-English educational system strengthens the discipline construction of Chinese schools (Song, 2011). The reasons are as follows: firstly, generally speaking, bilingual teaching selects the teaching materials introduced from abroad and makes some adjustments according to the target learners' localized characteristics and language proficiency which can absorb the advantages and learn from the latest teaching contents of teaching materials in developed countries. Second, it can open out the thoughts about teaching and update teachers' knowledge structure. Last but not least, it can cultivate inter-disciplinary talents for China's economic development. At present, due to the division of majors, many people only master expertise knowledge and know little about other disciplines.

Although English Chinese bilingual education has been promoted at all levels of education, there are still many disputes, which may affect its development process.

3. Challenges

The booming Chinese English bilingual education projects show that China is going through a process of educational decentralization. However, it must be noted that the national language policy actually excludes the possibility of using English as the teaching language in schools advocated by bilingual education, and there is no recognition of bilingual education in the new secondary school curriculum. This means that the government can flexibly terminate the Chinese-English bilingual education project at any time with the support of the law.

Chinese-English bilingual education programs in China are still growing rapidly. The Chinese government is eager to export its cultural products and is keen to help Chinese universities internationalize themselves and recruit international students to cope with the increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad. To achieve these goals, the government needs English, an international language, to make people hear and respect China's voices, and to attract international students to China. Therefore, the government recently began to discuss removing English from the national university entrance examination, or reducing the weight of English and increasing the weight of Chinese (Pan, 2015). Additionally, it can also arise the problem of uneven allocation of educational resources as families with more social and economic resources will invest heavily to help their children receive bilingual education to improve their English level and realize upward social mobility. Besides, the effectiveness of bilingual education programs is also affected by various background factors, such as the lack of trained teachers, inappropriate learning materials, so on and so forth.

4. Reflection and Pedagogical Implications

From the challenges the Chinese-English bilingual education programs have met, it is obvious that educational decentralization is complicated and has pressure on different sectors of society. The future of Chinese-English bilingual education in China seems to depend on how the interaction of various social, cultural, and political forces will affect the dynamic relationship between languages, that is, Chinese and English.

As for schools and teachers, under this complex circumstance of bilingual education, how to maximize the effectiveness of Chinese-English bilingual education in the context of the unbalanced status of two languages, uneven learning resources, and so forth is a crucial question.

Different bilingual schools have different norms and settings in bilingual courses, teachers, and teaching environments. In the curriculum of bilingual schools, schools and teachers should focus on improving students' bilingual ability. So, the following points need to be noted:

First, in schools, teaching curriculum and materials design need to be related to students' life as the development of language is based on the life and the purpose of learning a language is to communicate with others. Then, the policy implementation methods and means in bilingual schools should be flexible and diverse. Therefore, the bilingual programs can target the learners' needs and have the actual efficacy for promoting learners' bilingual competence. Besides, in the process of cultivating bilingual professionals, it should aim at making bilingual education suitable and accessible for students with different learning levels and training learners' different kinds of capabilities. Most importantly, it should build up learners' confidence in learning foreign languages and improve the efficiency of

self-study.

In terms of teaching methods, the main means of bilingual teaching is to teach basic subject knowledge in English. The purpose is to enable students to learn a foreign language while learning subject knowledge. And during the teaching process, teachers can use students' native language to explain some language points so that it can scaffold students' understanding.

5. Conclusion

This paper takes Chinese-English bilingual education as an exemplar to examine the complexity of educational decentralization in mainland China. From the major contributions and challenges, Chinese-English bilingual education still has a long way to go which requires constant reflections on the path.

During the implementation of bilingual education in China, it has made lots of contributions. First, it provides an immersive learning environment for English teaching and learning. Then, by learning from the advanced teaching materials and methods, bilingual teachers in China are equipped with greater language competence. Last but not least, it is conducive to cultivating inter-disciplinary professionals for China's economic development through Chinese-English bilingual education. However, there are still many challenges blocking the proceeding pace. First, the blurring regulations bring bilingual education more uncertainty. Moreover, with the growing status of China on the world stage and the public's aversion toward 'English obsession', how Chinese society and people view the position of English and Chinese makes the development of bilingual education more difficult and uncertain. Last, the uneven educational resources may increase the degree of detestation for the implementation of bilingual education for a part of people.

Therefore, considering the various challenges, as for the medium of bilingual education, schools and teachers should make some adjustments to learning and teaching. First, as the purpose of using language is to communicate with others, the teaching curriculum and materials should be highly relevant to students' lives and target learners' language proficiency levels. Moreover, when training students, mastering a language is not the teaching goal. Instead, cultivating learners with inter-disciplinary knowledge as well as excellent English ability should be the objective. And also, during the process of bilingual teaching, the use of learners' native language can also be a way to make the learning contents more understandable and intelligible.

References:

- [1] Baker, C. (2007). Becoming bilingual through bilingual education. *Handbook of multilingualism and multilingual communication*, 5, 131-52.
- [2] Hawkins, J. N. (2000). Centralization, decentralization, recentralization-Educational reform in China. *Journal of Educational Administration*.
- [3] Hu, G. (2009). The craze for English-medium education in China: Driving forces and looming consequences. *English Today*, 25(4), 47-54.
- [4] Pan, L. (2015). *English as a global language in China: Deconstructing the ideological discourses of English in language education*. New York: Springer.
- [5] Song, C. (2011). Bilingual Education in Colleges and Universities of China. *International education studies*, 4(1), 144-146.