Developing Bilingual Curriculum to Help Chinese Mainland’s Students to Get Ready to Become Intercultural Citizens

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Abstract. The communications between countries and nations are not only based on the economics in this modern globalised world and bilingual curriculum is a breakthrough and gateway to lead Chinese people to fit it. China began to pay attention to intercultural competence in 1980s and still on its way to seek for why, what, and how to develop bilingual curriculum at schools. Based on the intercultural aspects, this paper discussed the importance of developing bilingual curriculum in Chinese mainland’s schools as well as the terms of “citizenship education” and the “bilingual curriculum”, moreover, the challenges and the possible hypothetical solutions are also included.

Introduction

With the coming of the twenty-first century and the globalization of economy, the contemporary world is now international and intercultural. The cultural, political, economic and social citizenship is experiencing change every day; and education has taken a significant and critical role in teaching people to create a peaceful coexistence in order to respond to globalization. As the Delors UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) project suggested, people should “learn to live together” (Byram, 2008; Osler & Starkey, 2005; Unesco Education Sector., 2006) Bilingual curriculum, which improves Intercultural studies in some aspect, has become a hot topic within the field of education; so bilingual education has been emphasized amongst not only within China but also the whole world.

As Li (2006) mentioned that bilingual curriculum is not only a curriculum that helps to improve the language skills of the students’ but it also helps to grow an intercultural competence in their mind. A substantial percentage of schools all over the world claim through one of their vital missions that they will attempt to help students develop intercultural competence and prepare for their future roles as citizens (Osler, Audrey, & Starkey, Hugh, 2005). Ziwen Lu (2002), an influential Chinese educationist, pointed out that although Chinese students have an opportunity to interact with the outside world and the intercultural field, there is hardly an official, systematic bilingual curriculum that can be introduced to Chinese students that allows them to acquire a more appropriate view about how to become intercultural citizens. China is a gateway to the increasingly globalized world; that is to say that its intercultural capability has taken a significant role in spurring economic growth in these few decades.

As it will be discussed later that from Byram’s studies about the significant role of foreign language teaching in compulsory education that though foreign language learning learners could get “intercultural competence as well as communicative competence” and it “include preparing learners to be active citizens in transnational civil society (Byram, 2008, pp17-34). Besides, Bilingual curriculum has been generally discussed as an upgraded curriculum which is one of the significant measures that can help the Chinese higher education to keep pace with the advanced level worldwide (Han & Yu, 2013 ). Therefore, developing bilingual curriculum in China is an urgent task of paramount importance.

In this essay, the terms of “bilingual curriculum specifically for Chinese people” and “citizenship education” will be discussed first. Then, this essay will argue that bilingual curriculum is likely to achieve the goals that help Chinese students as intercultural citizens as well as the world Chinese
people. Finally, this essay will discuss challenges of introducing bilingual curriculum into school curriculum in the Chinese mainland; possible hypothetical solutions are also included.

**Terminology:**

(1) **What is bilingual curriculum specifically for Chinese people?**

China has experienced cultural diversity in its long history. Particularly, in recent years, the cultural diversity has increased. China, with a population of over 1.3 billion, is the world’s most populous country. The country has 7 main linguistic groups and 55 minor ethnic groups. China itself is already an “intercultural country” and it is, to this day, becoming increasingly global. The bilingual spectrum in China stands not only domestically but also in an external range (Ye, 2005). I summarise the bilingual curriculum specialized for Chinese as: A curriculum which taught by two languages that develop greater understanding the subject itself and as well as of foreign culture that can strengthen both their own national identity and intercultural competence and simultaneously improve perception of the diversity in the world. These skills are necessary to prepare themselves not only for their language skills but also for the rapidly changing globalized world and create a peaceful harmony world (Wang, Pan & Gao, 2005).

(2) **Citizenship education**

While citizenship is emphasised on the identity, “feeling secure and being in a position to exercise one’s rights and responsibilities…educators need to address learner’s identities and to promote and develop skills for communication and participation” (Osler, 2005). Additionally, citizenship also implies a critical respect for differences such as cultures, beliefs and values, although some of those aspects are not accepted by others (Figueroa, 2000:57, cited in Osler, 2005). However, the definition of citizenship is changing rapidly in the globalised world (Hobbs & Chernotsky, 2007). Therefore, school should take the duty to offer students the compressive citizenship education (Claxton, 2008).

Bryam (2008) analysed three aims of citizenship education: the first aim is about the emphasis on ethical and moral education; the second aim is the emphasis on learning about how to get involved in the society; the last aim is the emphasis on “that the importance of learning through service and involvement in the community… should be taken place here and now…” (pp.30-31).

There has been a clear change in China regarding the orientations of bilingual curriculum as well as citizenship curriculum over the last twenty years or since the adoption of the opening-up policy (Ye, 2005; Zhong & Lee, 2008, p.72).

(3) **To be the intercultural citizen—World Chinese citizens**

Bruner (1960) stated that” The first object of any act of learning...is that it should serve us in the future. Learning should allow us to go further more easily.” When it comes to the issue of the purpose of education, in this era of global competition and education reform, we should reflect upon the quality and upon the objectives of basic education for Chinese students (Zheng & Dai, 2013). The focus should be on whether education could meet the needs of students as well as cultivate them into innovative individuals. Perhaps, the primary reason for this phenomenon is China’s over-emphasis on exam scores. The conclusion, in view of the study, was that the Chinese educational system stymies students’ development and ability to integrate due to its ‘spoon-feeding’ system (Wang, Wu & Dong, 2012). Education should primarily expend the power of mind and enrich people’s spirit; the impact of a proper education lasts for a lifetime (Layard, Dunn, & Good Childhood Inquiry., 2009). Creativity is a vital tool for a student’s future development; consequently it plays a positive role in a quality education. China’s school curriculum is still on its way to achieving these aforementioned goals. According to Wenan Guo (2000, cited in Lu, 2002), the Chinese people’s quality education in this contemporary age contains: “The national consciousness and a sense of nation pride; the valid concept of rights and obligations; new ethical
spirit of humanitarian and comprehensive development of personal value targets; developing strong social and personal efficacy; mastering modern scientific and technological knowledge and scientific way of thinking; having healthy body and adapting environment quickly; having aesthetic sense and capacity; having subjective personality and entrepreneurial qualities; having an open concept, receptive to new experiences, thoughts and behaviour patterns and welcome changing mentality; developing democracy thinking, law thoughts and market concepts, furthermore having the economical quality; Treasuring time and conducting well time-management; paying attention to the mass media and public opinion; Spending and making use of leisure effectively; having ecological awareness and the consciousness of the world, to be the "World Chinese citizens" as well.

Lu (2002) holds the view that almost all the aspects of quality education mentioned above are related to the bilingual and intercultural curriculum. In other words, almost all the qualities necessary to an intercultural citizen are the qualities mentioned above. China, which comprises 20% of the world’s population, has a duty to enhance and maintain world peace. Through the bilingual curriculum, students can learn to be the “World Chinese citizens”—intercultural citizens (Yang & Dai, 2005). Subsequently, it is beneficial for not only Chinese development but also the world peace and most of the social problems could be solved from this stage. As such, the world needs a China in which bilingual curriculum has been instituted.

Yang and Dai (2005) summarised the three main ways to develop bilingual curriculum in China: through subject education, moral education and social education. Lu (2002) pointed out that the Chinese students have not gained enough intercultural education both quantitatively and qualitatively. This might be the main reason for Chinese students showed less interested in current politics and world affairs (Li, 2011). Although bilingual curriculum has not yet been an independent curriculum in Chinese mainland, but the curricular such as politics, history and other art curriculum should contain intercultural citizenship education.

The Challenges of Introducing Bilingual Curriculum into the School Curriculum in Chinese Mainland

Yang and Dai (2005) pointed out that there are 3 main factors of bilingual curriculum, which are the educator, the students and the textbook. The textbook is not difficult to get into the classroom in this globalised world. Besides, the students who take bilingual curriculum should have certain levels of language skills. As in China, students who have passed the College English Test 4 (CET4) are capable for bilingual curriculum (Yang and Dai, 2005). However, Hutchinson and Waters (2002 cited in Zhou and Ding, 2012) discussed that two aspects can be concluded due to the difference purpose of learning another language, such as English, which are “English for Academic Purposes, EAP” and “English for Occupational Purposes/ English for Vocational Purposes, EOP/EVP” and CET4 is at the stages of general English level. Therefore, it is not as easy as it seems for students who passed the CET4 to be fully prepared for the bilingual curriculum as a great amount of specialised academic vocabularies and aspects will be concluded in the curriculum (Chen and Xiao, 2008; Zhou and Ding, 2012). Thus, the lack of capable students might be one of the challenges of bilingual curriculum. Nevertheless, it may be solved as the development of students’ linguistic studies in the near future.

Moreover, the lack of qualified educators might be the biggest challenge of introducing bilingual curriculum into the school curriculum in Chinese mainland at this stage (Long, 2011; Cheng, 2007; Dong, 2007). It can be hardly denied that the language skill of the educators should be relevantly advanced and has little difficulty to make them clear during the whole period of the bilingual teaching. Thus, both the academic level of the subject and the language level are required for the educators. However, there are a great number of the native Chinese educators who are strong in their academic field that is relevantly weak in their second language and it is of great difficulty for them to improve their language skill to reach a high level of bilingual teaching in a short time (Dong, 2007). In solving this problem, special linguistic class for the educators could be introduced.
within the campus; nonetheless, it requires a great amount of time, teaching resources, and efforts (Long, 2011; Yu & Yuan, 2005). Besides, Zhang, Zou and Feng (2004) hold the view that by hiring foreign educators to teach the specialised course is one of the best ways to deal with this problem. Additionally, by introducing local Chinese educators who has overseas studying backgrounds may be a better option (Long, 2011). Chen and Jiang (2005) also pointed out that by creating a bilingual campus culture, such as bilingual radio station, the competition of singing English songs or opening English corner would also be helpful.

In addition, China has a tradition of politicizing education-related issues (Liu, 2011). In fact, this tradition of politicizing education-related issues simultaneously mounts the largest challenge to the successful introduction of bilingual curriculum within the country’s schools, whilst serving as the most potentially advantageous tool to the curriculum’s introduction. Education has been seen as a tool of enhancing political socialization since the days of antiquity (Cai, 2011). In other words, education should provide people with political thoughts, as well as management skills; education should labour to achieve the purpose of reaching a Utopian society. The result of education would be to reach the peak of their lives and to be able to make meaningful contributions to society.

Furthermore, it is pointed out “as part of its commitment to intercultural awareness and global education, the school is a key partner in the ‘Building Harmony in the Growth Corridor Project’” (Hassim & Cole-Adams, 2011). This might be another challenge as the schools in the Chinese mainland do make ample effort to achieve the “Harmony” aspect. However, the emphasis of “Harmony” seems to be unnecessary with regard to bringing Delors’ UNECO project, “Learn to live together” (Byram, 2008) in to practice. Lu (2002) pointed out that China already has abundant historical intercultural practice. Moreover, Chinese culture is one of the world’s oldest cultures, which can in a way facilitate the process of introducing bilingual curriculum into China. Chinese government assistance allow students to effectively develop cultural awareness, or become cultured, and develop those habits that will allow them to become intercultural citizens in both direct and indirect ways while learning other subjects in other languages (Li, 2006). School is a place of pursuit for truth, so students are expected to acquire knowledge, and critical thinking. They are also expected to be willing and brave in expressing their point of views.

Therefore, developing bilingual curriculum to increase the students’ intercultural competence is fitting to the urgent need for Chinese mainland’s school students to be informed and get ready to become intercultural citizens and it is a mission as well as a target for current Chinese education. Although this essay is focusing on the school development in Chinese mainland, it is still difficult to ensure that this new curriculum, which is hard to measure and evaluate (Dunne, 2011, p.609).

Nevertheless, all the challenges that are discussed above have no enough practical evidence yet. It is subjective not to introduce bilingual curriculum to Chinese mainland’s schools due to those challenges. Qualified educators should think about some novel solutions to transform the challenges into advantages, such as seeking for the way to improve the language level for the students and the educators, as well as transferring Chinese diversity background into a positive learning progress into the bilingual curriculum, and developing bilingual curriculum in mathematics, arts and history and other classrooms. The challenges might be solved through continuous efforts in the near future.

Conclusion

This essay primarily gives answers to 3 questions. First of all, this essay then gives answers to “Why it is important to develop bilingual curriculum in Chinese mainland’s schools?” It has been answered in the perspectives that the reason is based on the background of China that it is an urgent need to face the diversity domestic status and the increasingly globalised world. Secondly, this essay answered the question “What is bilingual curriculum specifically for Chinese people and how the bilingual curriculum will achieve the goal which is to develop Chinese students into intercultural citizens?” In order to give a comprehensive answer, the terms of “citizenship education” and the “bilingual curriculum” and were discussed in details. Moreover, the last question is “What are the challenges of introducing bilingual curriculum into the school curriculum in China
mainland?” is also being answered in details. Since the bilingual curriculum is a relatively new curriculum in Chinese education field, due to lack of official systematic experiences, there is no guarantee for not causing troubles caused in the uncertainty of its outcomes. As it also might be a huge challenge for gaining almost all the Chinese people’s fully ready to become intercultural citizens to China’s diversity domestic environment. It was pointed out that education policy maker are making efforts to prepare students to respond to the challenges of globalisation appropriately (Osler, 2005, p.6). However, there are some challenges to its processes and developments, and to make the bilingual curriculum for Chinese mainland’s school students into practice at this stage.

Despite the difficulties, it is expected that in the near future, China will be able to develop and implement a more systematic and efficient bilingual education across curriculum modules for Chinese students.

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