

An insight into innovation in international education in e-business teaching from an empirical investigation perspective

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ABSTRACT: In recent years, some issues have led to the current bilingual teaching remaining unfruitful and stagnant in Chinese colleges and universities. Proposed in this article is that a group of young, professional teachers be trained as the potential teachers of bilingual teaching. Although there is unbalanced and uneven development of students' language skills, it is of importance to elaborate the overall objectives of the bilingual teaching curriculum in order to guide the students in participating in the classroom. Under such circumstances, students who have undertaken a preliminary course as a good solid foundation could adapt to the language transformation. Furthermore, it is important to integrate the resources by combining lectures and meetings into the bilingual teaching. It would make the teaching model and methods more flexible and meet the needs of students at different levels.

INTRODUCTION

The global economic slowdown has led to the realisation that universities in Europe are lagging behind their counterparts elsewhere. Part of the appeal of, and soaring interest in, e-business is the belief that if successful on the Internet, global success is assured. Europe is finally trying to catch up in teaching e-business [1]. This would be alarming for China's education. With the rapid development of the national economy, national education and international trade, there are deeper international business exchanges and co-operation. Meanwhile, there are more and more foreign students studying in China and, therefore, international education increasingly has become an important part of China's higher education system.

With the further internationalisation of education, many colleges and universities encourage the implementation of bilingual teaching, in order to gradually cultivate college students with an international vision. Various schools have carried out different bilingual teaching policies based on the different characteristics and demands of different majors and different levels. The establishment and development of bilingual teaching is an effective solution to promoting the country's higher education internationalisation, but also an important way to promote the construction of international curricula in colleges and universities.

BACKGROUND OF E-BUSINESS TEACHING

With the bursting of the Internet bubble after the so-called dot-com boom and the emergence of e-business companies, it is time for universities to refocus on the present and future status, and role of e-business in their curricula [2]. At present, bilingual teaching courses can be divided roughly into two categories, viz. science and humanities. Generally speaking, most of the advanced concepts, theory and technology in the science courses basically are from the developed countries, e.g. the United States and Europe.

Chinese researchers also tend to agree with this opinion. Since English is the language of modern science and technology, English proficiency can help students greatly in keeping up-to-date with new knowledge and broadening their vision. But for the humanities courses, due to the differences in teaching environments and China's policies toward foreign countries, there is a need to specifically select a bilingual curriculum. e-Business courses currently are taught in almost every college discipline.

The majority of faculties seem to prefer that the e-business course be incorporated into the existing courses or new courses be created to be offered as electives and taught across the curriculum. They also did not think that e-business courses required any special methods except a greater use of technology [3]. Furthermore, as electronic business is part of the globalisation of technology, its development and communications is based on the international general language.

The establishment of bilingual teaching curricula in the discipline of e-business is entirely feasible and necessary. The main approach to such a course would involve using foreign teaching materials, classroom teaching, class discussion, before and after assignments and a final written examination.

RESEARCH CONTENT

Over the past few years, e-business courses evolved rapidly to become a strategic imperative. Universities have responded by embracing e-business more widely in their academic programmes and teaching e-business as a subject [4]. Bilingual teaching with English as a foreign language increases the requirements of both students and teachers. Both should have a conscious awareness of the need to co-operate in the teaching process. However, according to personal experience, most students were not aware of this need. Meanwhile, for bilingual teaching, students require good professional knowledge and foreign language ability.

The content of the course mainly includes the technologies and information systems that underpin e-business processes. This is not a big issue for students in China, who are adept in e-business technology [5]. Admittedly, the biggest obstacle to overseas students studying in China is the learning difficulty caused by differences in language and culture. English, as spoken in different countries, has regional speech variations. Also, different nations have their own culture and mode of expression. These obstacles need to be overcome to allow successful communication. There is the need for language, which is tied to verbal communication, to be expressive and accurate. The challenge of using a foreign language in e-business teaching is to harness its potential to better serve the needs of the teachers and learners [6].

However, the curriculum in some universities lacks consistency. The bilingual teaching starting time is not reasonable; it is either too early or too late. The courses lack cohesion and continuity, and matters are never considered from the student's perspective. It is not reasonable to have a teaching syllabus and plan without including a preliminary course to set a good solid foundation.

This is required since some students do not have the basic language ability required for bilingual teaching. The lack of such a foundation will affect the students' interest in learning. Consequently, the lack of communication and interaction between teachers and students will either affect the enthusiasm of teachers or waste a lot of teaching resources. This results in current bilingual teaching remaining unfruitful and stagnant in Chinese colleges and universities. This unbalanced development and uneven situation negatively affects the smooth development of the internationalisation of education and bilingual teaching.

ANALYSIS AND METHOD

In light of the problems pointed out above and based upon teaching experience, specific measures are proposed in this article for improving bilingual education. The roles and responsibilities of both teachers and students in e-business teaching are illustrated in Figure 1.

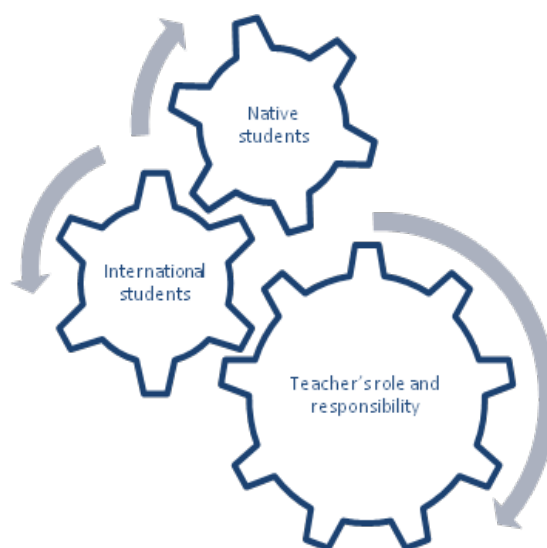


Figure 1: The role and responsibility of participants in e-business teaching.

Bilingual teaching is a teaching model in line with international standards, which helps most students to acquire knowledge and broaden their vision. An excellent bilingual faculty is necessary for a bilingual teaching course. It would be best to recruit well-known experts from worldwide as teachers. However, the cost of such teaching would be too high. Moreover, the scarcity of well-known Chinese and foreign experts makes the proposal infeasible. At present, most colleges and universities recruit teachers who either have a PhD from abroad or have experience as visiting scholars in

foreign countries. They can form the backbone of teachers for bilingual teaching. It is essential to train a group of skilled foreign language young teachers from the existing professional teachers. The ideal candidate for the bilingual teaching staff would have solid language skills and specialised knowledge of electronic business. An alternative solution is to send teachers who have good foreign language skills to learn bilingual teaching in an advanced university in China where there are better bilingual teaching environments. This could improve the use of bilingual teaching in public and specialised courses.

The targeted objects of bilingual teaching are the students. Students need to have high motivation to participate in bilingual teaching. The English level of students is uneven, which directly influences the effectiveness of bilingual teaching. Learning over four years is considered in this article, where the foreign language level is uneven. According to the authors' personal teaching experience, it would not be ideal to implement bilingual teaching in all courses, since it would not be effective for all classes. Generally speaking, the majority of students do not care whether or not bilingual teaching is implemented; some students do not even like bilingual teaching. The few students who like bilingual teaching are in a minority. At present, students are required to preview and review course content before and after lectures in order to improve their foreign language skills. This enables them to reach the required bilingual teaching level. Another relatively simple and feasible method in bilingual classes is to ask students, who are adept at English, to act as initiators of communications in class. These students and the teacher could interact and communicate with each other in the classroom during the process of bilingual teaching.

For overseas students, there is a need to provide more teaching facilities and support services. For these students there is not only the teaching language transformation from Chinese to English to contend with, but also the changes in teaching philosophy, e.g. educational administration, lecture arrangements, extra-curricular tutoring and practicals, teaching files, books and reference material. These students mostly use English as their native language, and have strong enthusiasm and desire to learn. Their study experience is relatively good. An important point is that most of them develop a foundation in Chinese. There would be a further optimisation and upgrade of services and facilities, including the bilingual credit elective system, bilingual administrative documents, library facilities, extra-curricular English lectures and expert guidance. These improvements to the teaching facilities and support services improve the effectiveness of bilingual teaching.

DISCUSSION AND SOLUTION

A survey was carried out of the factors that influence bilingual teaching and learning. There were 59 interviewees, and the results are shown in Table 1. Usually, bilingual teaching is in a fixed class. However, foreign language proficiency is not high and is uneven. If students do not have the necessary preparation for the course, the majority of them would lose status during classroom teaching.

The inappropriate use of English on the course would be detrimental to the learning enthusiasm of the majority of students. For example, personal teaching experience shows that a lecture will fail, if the students do not communicate with the teacher and do not consciously preview the teaching content. It is not appropriate to make full use of a foreign language during bilingual teaching unless the students are able to participate. Otherwise, it is easy to cause a sudden loss of confidence, which would seriously affect the teaching. Therefore, during bilingual teaching, the principles of appropriateness and moderation should be followed. It is essential to pay attention to the appropriate use of foreign languages. The reasonable way is neither too easy nor too hard.

Table 1: The influencing factors of bilingual teaching and learning.

Influence factor	Interviewees	Percentage
Personal attitude	20	33.9
Learning environment	26	44.1
Facility	30	50.8
Faculty and teaching staff	43	72.9
Other	15	25.4

The use of various levels of English is daily experienced by teachers and students in the classroom. The basic level can be learnt anywhere and students need to master it in everyday life. The other use of English is as the foreign language of professional knowledge in bilingual teaching. Here, there are still certain difficulties for the majority of students. It is necessary to distribute handouts in advance to help the students master the knowledge through the mother tongue so that there would be a smooth introduction to new knowledge. When the new knowledge is presented, the students could review the knowledge using the handouts. Meanwhile, at the start of classroom teaching, it is important to elaborate the overall objectives and the bilingual teaching curriculum in order to guide the students in how to participate in the classroom.

A better approach is to encourage students to review the original and classic literature. These empirical solutions can produce satisfactory teaching. For one thing, the students who have had a preliminary course as a good solid foundation could adapt to the transformation between languages. The conscious repeating of memorised expressions before and

after the class can help students to understand the language. This atmosphere is more conducive to the students quickly improving their English. In addition, students who expand their scope of reading foreign literature are inclined to have a deeper insight into professional knowledge. As well, such students are likely to have a better grasp of the language and be more flexible in its use. The levels in e-business teaching are illustrated in Figure 2.

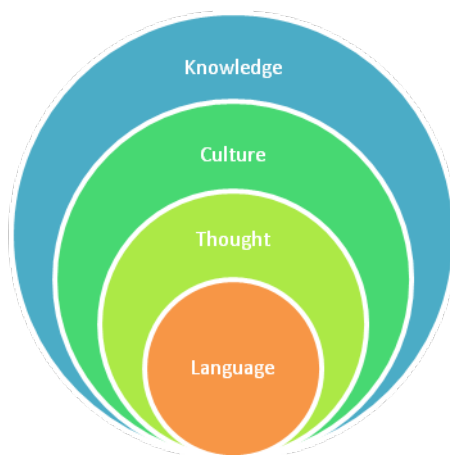


Figure 2: The evolving levels in e-business teaching.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings indicate that candidates who are adept in foreign language or have international experience are more competitive and appealing to employers. That is because the candidate with a language advantage and foundation in technology has more comprehensive skills. It is reasonable that there be an urgent demand for the education community to invest resources and time in fostering students who would benefit from bilingual teaching. There are various influencing factors in e-business bilingual teaching. The faculty and teaching staff factor is regarded as the most significant one from the survey reported above, the exhaustive data of which are illustrated in Figure 3. The diagram indicates the aspect on which the education community should concentrate.

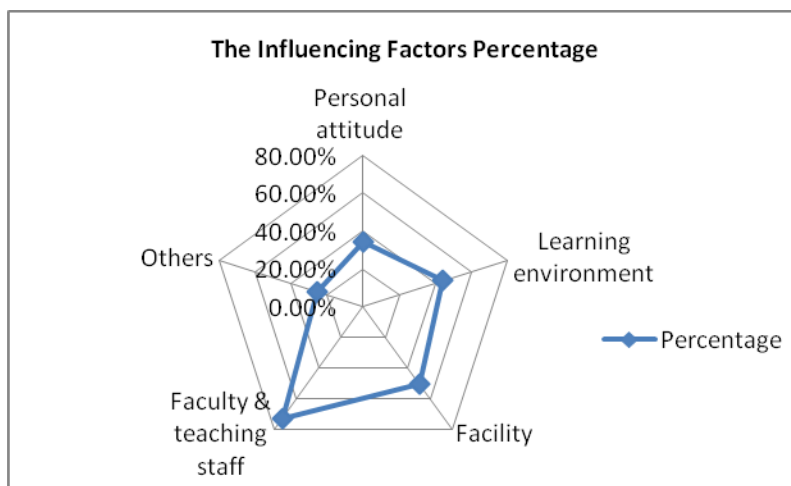


Figure 3: Percentages of the influencing factors.

For university or college bilingual teaching, it is essential to help students master a common professional vocabulary, as well as having good reading comprehension, translation and writing skills. Nowadays, there is more frequent international co-operation and more academic conferences. Knowledge and ability should not be limited to English writing and translation, especially, for the highly intelligent student. These students are encouraged to participate in academic seminars, lectures and related academic presentations. It is a good opportunity for them to communicate with each other via the international language. Therefore, it is of importance to explain the basic content of vocabulary, sentence translation and academic writing during the bilingual teaching, as well as to place more emphasis on students' listening, speaking and comprehension ability in order to extend their professional foreign language abilities.

What is more, the teacher could also develop the course by integrating e-business technologies into the teaching of it, as well as incorporating managerial/business content. Some challenging issues related to e-business implementation could be also discussed in project building and management in which students are encouraged to participate [7]. With a hands-on approach, it exposes students to the realities of e-business development [8]. Based upon the oral and written evaluations included in the communications with the client and the final project documentation, students would feel that

this project is the most valuable learning experience of the e-business course. Furthermore, it is important for students to understand that a positive relationship exists between the actual e-business teaching and learning processes.

Under such circumstances, it is important to integrate the lectures and meetings into the bilingual teaching content. Being application-oriented, the classroom teaching would be more targeted and practical. Meanwhile, different students' needs are not exactly the same. Those who intend to pursue an academic career should not only pay attention to electronic business technology, but also focus on speaking, the development of reading comprehension, the complex translation of long sentences and the ability to write academic papers. Those who intend to enter the job market should concentrate on speaking; on the reading and translation of professional manuals in a foreign language; the expression, description and terminology of software product outsourcing service processes; the written examination and interview related to the company recruitment; and the certification examination. Therefore, the teaching mode and methods for different levels should be more flexible to meet different student needs.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, some issues have led to the current bilingual teaching remaining unfruitful and stagnant in Chinese colleges and universities. The proposition in this article is that a group of young teachers with a high level of professional foreign language ability be chosen from existing professional teachers, to become potential bilingual teachers. This is because they will have good, solid language skills and specialised knowledge of electronic business, making them ideal candidates as bilingual teaching staff.

Meanwhile, the bilingual teaching ideas and concepts must be fully appreciated by the students, who are also required to pay enough close attention to bilingual teaching. Although there is an imbalance and uneven development of students' language abilities, it is important to elaborate the overall objectives and the bilingual teaching curriculum in order to guide the students in participating in the classroom. Under such circumstances, the students with a preliminary course as a good solid foundation are better able to adapt to the transformation in the use of languages. Furthermore, it is important to integrate the resources which combine the lectures and meetings into the bilingual teaching content. Being application-oriented would make the classroom teaching more targeted and more practical. Therefore, the teaching model and methods would be more flexible to meet the needs of students at different levels.

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