

Trends and Implications of Bilingual Education for Minority Language Students in the US

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze trends of bilingual education for minority language students in the US and find applicable and relevant implications for bilingual education, which began in 2009, for multicultural families in South Korea. The result shows that trends of bilingual education in the US changed from “transitional bilingual education” during the early stage to “maintenance bilingual education” and further to the latest “enrichment bilingual education” and “two-way immersion bilingual education. The findings suggest that bilingual education in the US uses the majority as well as minority language for entire subjects. Second, after a certain period of bilingual acquisition, students of bilingual and general classes participated in the same classes. Third, bilingual education curriculum is connected throughout elementary, middle, and high school education.

Keywords: bilingualism, language minority, dual lingualism, multicultural family

1. Introduction

Bilingual education refers to education that fosters the ability to speak two languages. This concept includes the idea of “teaching the ability to speak two or more languages,” and “education using two or more languages.” Bilingual education in the US began with the purpose of teaching English to the increasing number of children of immigrant families, so that they can quickly become assimilated to the American society. Currently, ethnic minorities in the US account for one third of the entire population, but the figure is expected to increase to 38% by 2025 and 50% by 2050 [1][2], which explains the increasing attention to bilingual education. Further, various studies support the arguments that diverse culture and language environments are valuable assets to individuals and the nation and that bilingual education promotes stable growth of immigrants and their children while improving national competitiveness [3][4][5][6].

Meanwhile, in South Korea, bilingual education has been conducted since 2009, based on the idea that the different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds of multicultural families are advantageous for social integration. However, it is still in the early stage and there is no specific philosophy behind the policy, as different departments and local organizations continue to operate the programs.

Table 1. Population by Race Alone or in Combination(unit: %)

Age, race alone or in combination	2000	2010
	Percent of total population	Percent of total population
Total population	100.0	100.0
White	77.1	74.8
Black or African American	12.9	13.6
American Indian & Alaska Native	1.5	1.7
Asian	4.2	5.6
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	0.3	0.4
Some Other Race	6.6	7.0

Source: United States Census Bureau. (2010). <http://www.census.gov>

This study aims to analyze changes in bilingual education in the US that began 40 years earlier than in South Korea and find meaningful implications that can be applied to bilingual education for multicultural families in South Korea. For analysis, dissertations; major policy reports by the federal government and education districts; website documents; reports related to bilingual education in the US; as well as relevant policy reports, and press releases by the South Korean government were reviewed.

2. Theoretical Review of Bilingual Education

2.1. Theoretical Background of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education for ethnic minorities in the US officially began to be provided to elementary and middle schools in 1968 when the inflow of immigrants peaked and the “Bilingual Education Act” was passed. In the early stages, the US enforced standard English education according to the assimilation policy. However, despite the substantial budget, the result was a failure. As the number of dropouts and juvenile delinquents increased, the US government concluded students whose mother tongues were taught by their parents were rejected from the beginning of their schooling, and as a result, the students became withdrawn and their academic performance deteriorated. In other words, the government

recognized the limitations in teaching in the English language alone, and decided to provide bilingual education by using a minority language to teach English, or teaching both minority languages and English.

Bilingual education provides a learning environment where students use more than one language. Therefore, two or more languages are in use at schools providing bilingual education, and the contents and levels of the programs vary according to the region. Basic, well-known types of bilingual education programs include transitional programs, maintenance programs, and enrichment programs [8][21]. Transitional programs teach most subjects in the mother tongue of the language-minority students until they can learn in English, and later only uses English. Therefore, the policymakers in the US support this type of program. Maintenance programs have the advantage of securing cognitive development by using two languages while pride in the mother tongue remains intact, as they enable students to maintain their mother tongue while learning English. However, it did not become popular because the students could not significantly improve their English skills. Enrichment programs were designed for students who use English to learn a second language, by teaching subjects only in the second language, so that students would be prepared to adapt to different cultures in the future.

In addition, the two-way immersion bilingual programs mix language-minority students and language-majority students in the same class, so that they can use the combination of two languages as a learning tool. These programs are known to secure identities of students related to their mother tongues while improving adaptability to English. However, they are still being tested [3].

2.2. Controversy related to Bilingual Education

In today's world, where different countries interact freely with one another, speaking only one language does not guarantee social and economic success. As language influences intellectual and emotional development of children, different countries around the world teach children at least two languages for the purpose of stable growth. However, in the US, some argue that linguistic and cultural diversity causes racial and ethnic conflicts, and therefore, bilingual education should not be permitted from the beginning [9][10]. In the US, a country with multicultural, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic attributes, advocates and opponents debate over the utility of bilingual education.

Advocates of bilingual education argue that cultural and linguistic diversity is a national strength that must be nurtured [11]. They emphasize that bilingual education is the most effective method to teach LEP (limited English proficient) students or ELLs (English Language Learners). They believe language-minority students can retain their mother tongue and culture while learning English, and develop learning skills with their mother tongue while simultaneously learning English as the second language. Moreover, the advocates emphasize that diversity is a rich social resource. In fact, Collier and Thomas (1999) demonstrated that bilingual students show stronger cognitive skills and have better academic performance [5]. Further, Krashen (1996) argued that bilingual education helps students improve their academic performance based on the mother tongue education program

at school while having interest in subject matters and contents based on the gradual exit program, and that learning and language skills like literacy and background knowledge must be developed in the first language [12].

However, opponents of bilingual education suggest that bilingual education, in fact, makes students believe they can live without learning the mainstream language. Hence, they become lazy in improving language skills, which results in their failure to acquire either language. Porter (1990), opposing bilingualism as a resource, points out that the ultimate goal of education is to enable all students to function successfully in mainstream society, and that, without a high level of mainstream language proficiency, students will eventually lose opportunities for choosing a job and moving up in social class [13]. Further, Glenn (1997) emphasizes that there is no evidence to suggest that teaching LEP students in their mother tongue brings long-term advantages or disadvantages, and that it is more effective to teach English as the first language [9].

However, a series of studies strongly support the argument that well-designed bilingual education programs promote, and not hinder English development of students [7].

3. Trends of Bilingual Education for Language-Minority Students in the US

3.1. Trends in the Paradigm of Bilingual Education

Early bilingual education in the US was based on transitional bilingualism, and taught the mother tongue to language-minority students only for the first two to three years until they acquired standard English perfectly. In the 1970s and 1980s, maintenance bilingualism that teaches both English and the mother tongue was promoted, based on the belief that the mother tongues of language-minority students can be new resources. Further, from the 1990s, the trend switched to enrichment bilingualism, which is focused on simultaneous acquisition of English and the mother tongue of both language-minority students and language-majority students [14].

Meanwhile, Bilingual Education Act was enacted in 1968, and after five amendments, was replaced in 2002 by the English Acquisition Act, which is part of the No Child Behind Act (NCLB). Under NCLB, the phrase limited English proficient (LEP) is used instead of bilingual, which is specified in Title III. Instead of encouraging language-minority students to use their mother tongue, NCLB emphasizes English language development (ELD) for improving English skills, and requires the quick improvement of the English skills of students [15].

Regarding the results of NCLB, there are two positions. One is that, even though there was no legal enforcement to teach only in English, mother tongue support programs and bilingual programs have been reduced in some states [16]. However, others argue that the enforcement partly contributed to improving academic performance as the school's responsibility for language-minority students, structured English immersion programs, and subject integration protection programs were reinforced [17].

3.2. Training Teachers in Bilingual Education

Each state in the US exercises practical authority over public education, including teacher training. In general, institutions that foster schoolteachers include teachers' colleges, liberal arts colleges, and universities, and are certified as teacher education organizations by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). In order to become an English teacher in a multicultural environment, one is required to complete bilingual education certificate programs at a university or pass the ESL exam. In New York, based on the Amendments to the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education Pursuant to Section 207 of Education Law of BILINGUAL EDUCATION, qualification as a teacher is given to those who complete a university-level course that equals 24 credits at any educational institution, which provides a certified bilingual education program [18].

3.3. Even Start Family Literacy by Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

Since 1965, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) has been providing Even Start Family Literacy as an education program for immigrant children, which supports improvement of reading and writing skills in a close educational relationship between the parents and children. It was applied to students from low-income families, immigrant families, and families without higher education, and to parents and children of families whose householder is a teenager. This program is run autonomously according to the circumstances of each state [19].

3.4. Korean Dual-Language Program of an Elementary School in California

The Third Elementary School, a public elementary school in Los Angeles, began to offer Korean Dual-Language Program (KDLP) since 2000. In every grade from the kindergarten to the fifth, one dual-language class is formed for students to learn all subjects in Korean and English. Students can sign up for the dual-language class even if they do not speak the first language, Korean, or the second language English, and in the classroom are both students who speak English fluently and those who do not naturally communicate by using both English and Korean. Furthermore, between the third and fifth grades, students of the dual-language class and other classes participate in "mixing," which allows them to mix with one another and attend classes of different teachers according to the subject, for some days per week to ultimately improve social adaptability. Meanwhile, Korean dual-language education in LA is continued by the dual-language program at John Borroughs and Berendo Middle School, and Fairfax High School.

The goal of the dual-language program at these renowned schools in LA is to foster students who are proficient in learning and communicating in the second language English, to speak the first language fluently, to show excellent performance in all subjects, and to respect cultural diversity [20].

4. Actualities of Bilingual Education for Multicultural Families in South Korea

For a long time in South Korea, bilingual education has been focused on Korean and English. However, since the mid-2000s, with a rapidly growing multicultural society, South Korea has been offering bilingual education to teach the mother tongue, other than Korean and English, to marriage immigrants, naturalized Koreans, and their children. In 2009, Ministry of Education and Seoul Office of Education jointly trained married immigrant women of higher education as bilingual teachers for the first time. Further, as of 2014, about 400 bilingual teachers are teaching students of multicultural backgrounds in South Korea. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) have fostered 100 bilingual teachers and assigned them to multicultural family support centers around the country since 2011.

However, bilingual education in South Korea has poor accessibility and small numbers because it has been part of Korean language education. Moreover, the negative attitude toward bilingual education and the regional disparity have been pointed out as problems. Since it is still in the early stage, bilingual education in South Korea may learn from the knowledge, information, and programs of the US, which has decades of experience in the field.

Table 2. Distribution of nationalities in the bilingual teacher program of Ministry of Education

China/Taiwan	Japan	Vietnam	Mongolia	Others	Total
111 (44.1%)	57 (24.2%)	6 (2.5%)	34 (14.4%)	28 (11.9%)	236 (100.0%)

Source: Data from Ministry of Education. (2012)

Table 3. Distribution of nationalities in the bilingual teacher program of MOGEF

China/Taiwan	Japan	Vietnam	Mongolia	Others	Total
77 (63.6%)	24 (19.8%)	14 (11.6%)	5 (4.1%)	1 (0.8%)	121 (100.0%)

Source: Data from MOGEF. (2012)

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the trends of bilingual education for language-minority students in the US have changed from transitional bilingualism for assimilation, focused on English in the 1960s, to maintenance bilingualism that recognized the importance of bilingualism during the 1970s and 1980s. This was followed by enrichment bilingualism that promoted simultaneous acquisition of minority and majority languages. Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, a public elementary school in California is running a "parallel bilingual program," which is in the experimental stage at present[22].

The following implications were found in the case study of the US: First, in bilingual education, all subjects are taught in the minority and majority languages, and students and teachers communicate by using both languages, instead of simply teaching English and the mother tongue for communication. Second, after a point when students show

noticeable improvement in language skills, for some days of each week, students of the dual language class and general classes are mixed together to study in the same class. Third, the education is continued from the elementary school to middle and high schools as students build the foundation for bilingualism in elementary school, when their cognitive development is most active, and then continue bilingual education programs in higher education.

Bilingual education in South Korea is still at an early stage, and, therefore, it may benefit from selectively applying the US system that has been established for a longer time to designated schools. A special class can be created in schools in regions where children of multicultural families are concentrated. Here, bilingual teachers for different subjects can teach these subjects in two languages so that students can acquire bilingualism and maintain their mother tongue and culture while naturally being integrated into mainstream society. To do so, it is essential to secure teachers with bilingual skills.

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