

Issues in the Implementation of Bilingual Education in Vietnam

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Abstract

This paper explores the implementation of bilingual education at a private institution in Vietnam, with a focus on its successes and challenges. Despite long-term English education as a compulsory subject at grade levels 3 to 12, there is still a need for Vietnamese learners of English to improve their language proficiency beyond the national curriculum. For that reason, many institutions have been established to make English a more important part of the curriculum, not simply a subject but a means of communication and a medium of instruction. In other words, the aim is to make those learners reach bilingualism. However, training learners to be bilingual is not an easy mission, since it has numerous requirements. Observing how bilingual education was implemented at a private institution in Vietnam, this paper reveals some positive effects on learners' language development along with challenges regarding teaching materials, qualified staff, and negative influences of the national curriculum.

Introduction

While English is a mandatory subject in Vietnam, the focus is still on grammar and vocabulary, not communicative competence (Denham, 1992; Nunan, 2003). To develop English language proficiency of future generations of Vietnamese students, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) proposed the use of English as the medium of instruction at high school and college levels nationwide (MOET, 2008). As stated by MOET in Directive 1400, the national curriculum embarked on a project entitled "Teaching and Learning in English in the National Education System 2008-2020," or "Project 2020" for short. The goal is that by the year 2020, a majority of high school graduates will be able to undertake higher studies entirely in English and communicate meaningfully in English. Moreover, high school students will be taught mathematics and a number of other subjects in English. In order to accomplish this goal, MOET encourages high schools to implement bilingual education to gradually familiarize learners with English as a medium of instruction.

However, research on bilingual programs in Vietnamese public schools has shown the difficulties involved in following MOET's directions. Some have concluded that many public gifted high schools fail to make English the medium of instruction due to unqualified teachers, lack of materials and facilities, and inappropriate use of teaching materials (Ben Tre Department of Education, 2017). Responding to the need for bilingual education, many private institutions have bilingual or international programs following British or American educational systems for



Chi, D. N. (2017). Issues in the implementation of bilingual education in Vietnam. *TESOL Working Paper Series*, 15, 96-113.

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those who plan to study abroad (Hoang, 2011). These programs aim to promote the use of English for varying purposes, such as teaching, learning, and communication. However, little is known about the extent to which these programs have succeeded in implementing a bilingual education model at private institutions (Hoang, 2011). Hence, there is a need for an in-depth study on how those institutions implement those programs and to what extent they are able to improve learners' English language proficiency. This paper aims to address this issue through a case study of a private educational institution in Vietnam which claims to offer a Vietnamese-English bilingual education program. It is the only institution claiming to have such a program in the Mekong Delta region. Before I present the case study, I will review the key characteristics of a bilingual individual and forms of bilingual education.

Bilingualism

Definitions of bilingualism are quite controversial. A very early one is presented by Bloomfield (1993), stating that bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages at *native-like level*. Myers-Scotton (2006) disputed two premises of such a definition, namely (1) speaking should be viewed as the uniquely defining aspect of bilingualism and (2) a native-like level in second language (L2) is a requirement to be bilingual. Myers-Scotton (2006), in defining bilingualism, concentrated on the need to distinguish between *knowing* and *using* a language. Knowing a language refers to sufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (Richards, 1974). An individual who is good at grammar but fails to produce casual conversations in the second language is not a competent speaker; language learners are expected to achieve both grammatical and communicative competences (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Therefore, a bilingual, as defined by Myers-Scotton (2006, p. 65), is “a person who can carry on at least casual conversations on everyday topics in a second language.” Hence, for a person to be labeled as a bilingual she should possess considerable communicative competence, not just few words in the second language (Andersson & Boyer, 1978; Cummins, 1980; Myers-Scotton, 2006).

To carry out casual conversations in English, learners need to obtain “the ability to use English effectively for specific purposes, functions, and discourses in specific communities” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 235). Myers-Scotton (2006) neither required nativeness in speaking a second language as a *must* for a bilingual nor provided a clear explanation for her view. Other researchers, similarly not making nativeness a requirement for bilingualism, clearly stated that nativeness tends to be equivalently seen as the level of fluency in oral performances and that it is not necessary for bilinguals (Pang, 2012; Ro & Cheatham, 2009). In discussing the issue of nativeness, Pang (2012) claimed that exposure to both languages from an early age contributes to native-like fluency in both languages. This fluency, according to Pang (2012), is shaped by three factors. Firstly, to reach fluency in both languages, there is a strong need for patience, as language development is a gradual process. Secondly, exposure to both languages in an encouraging environment makes a substantial contribution to this fluency. Thirdly, it is necessary to routinely use both languages. Notably, Pang (2012) maintained that not every individual has the chance to acquire both languages from an early age. It has been shown that in an environment where there is a dominant language, language decay will occur in the non-dominant one because of the limited use of that language (Ro & Cheatham, 2009). From this viewpoint, nativeness in both

languages can occur but is not guaranteed in the long term. As such, one of the determining factors for language development or decay is then shifted to the environment, as this decides what languages should be used or limited. Heredia and Altarriba (2001) noticed a potential language shift in bilinguals. Specifically, when a bilingual's second language is developed and frequently used, it can be shifted as the bilingual's first language and have a strong influence on the bilingual's use of the two languages. Therefore, the dominant language in this situation can change from the first to the second, once non-dominant language.

Whilst Myers-Scotton (2006) prioritized orality as the criterion for bilingualism, literacy is also taken into account by other researchers. Hsui (1996) realized that literacy is an important aspect to consider for bilingualism; additionally, Amankwa and Hammond (2011) suggested that literacy is not simply the ability to read and write, but it should also involve applications of these skills, which is similar to what Andersson and Boyer (1978) and Cummins (1980) proposed about the ability to understand instructions and cope with study programs in the target language. Unexpectedly, biliteracy is not easy to pursue, as bilinguals can have oral ability in both languages but fail to achieve proficient literacy in the non-dominant language (Amankwa & Hammond, 2011; Hsui, 1996). In conclusion, literacy in both languages is ideal but may not always be possible.

In sum, bilinguals are individuals who can carry out casual conversations in two languages *without* equal fluency and who may not attain an ideal level of literacy in both languages, especially in non-dominant languages.

However, to make learners proficient in English as bilinguals, Bialystok (1997), Singleton (2001), and Allbeto-Contesse (2009) emphasized the contexts of second language learning and the use of L2, which they consider to be significant in second language proficiency. Hence, the chief concern is the context of English language education and the use of English in Vietnam, as these two factors notably contribute to language proficiency of learners. In other words, there should be educational programs and supportive environments in which English language use is maximized.

Forms of Bilingual Education

Numerous characteristics of bilingual education have been described by Hamers and Blanc (2000) and Findlay (1998). Among those, I have selected certain features which are appropriate in the Vietnamese educational context.

Language Use

English is the target language which teachers and learners aim to develop, but the use of Vietnamese should not be completely abandoned. Hamers and Blanc (2000) suggested a shift from transitional bilingual education to immersion.

In the first stage, instructions and interactions should be done mostly in English with a minor amount of Vietnamese in certain cases. The aim is to familiarize learners with using English as the major language (Baker, 1993). Swain and Johnson (as cited in Tarone, 2005), noted that a bilingual program acceptably has 90% of the target language (English) and 10% of the native or first language (Vietnamese). Cummins (2007) noted that the L1 is not always the enemy

in the process of gaining high proficiency in an L2; in some cases, the use of an L1 can be supportive for learning and developing the L2. This is especially true if the L1 is used as a tool for making the L2 comprehensible and as scaffolding for more advanced performances in the L2. Therefore, the use of Vietnamese should not be completely forbidden, but it should be utilized only when it is needed for clarification of grammar points, complex words, or terms (Kieu, 2010). However, teachers in this type of program should be careful not to overuse their L1.

The second stage is an immersion program in which English becomes the dominant or even *sole* language used for both instruction and interaction (Findlay, 1998). Learners of English are unlikely to substantially develop their English proficiency unless they are exposed to an environment in which English plays a dominant role in almost every activity (Jost, 2009). Also, communication in the target language should be broadened to include unfamiliar topics to increase learners' linguistic knowledge and flexibility in language use. That is also the reason why Stein (1999) suggested learning both academic and non-academic vocabulary to allow learners to apply appropriate ways of communicating in both formal and informal situations. Thereby, learners will be able to use appropriate language for different situations. Tosi (1986) further mentioned learning with English native speakers so that English truly becomes the medium of instruction.

In short, in bilingual education, the target language (English) should be the dominant language. Use of the L1 should be limited to exceptional cases, such as clarifications. In addition, English should be used not only in teaching and learning but also in other communicative settings. In other words, learners will benefit from gradual immersion into an English-only environment.

Content

Besides language, content is worthy of attention. Pham (2007) argued that an effective bilingual program should focus on not only the development of language skills in learners but also how learners use those skills to interact towards real-life topics in the program. Instead of simply directing students to practice specific language skills, a topic can provide learners with many options to use English through a variety of exercises and activities, such as reading, role-plays, discussions, and presentations. However, chosen topics should have relevance to students' life experience to provide learners with a closer look at how the target language is used in real-life contexts, which is an aim of language learning (Pham, 2007). Baker (1993) indicated that language programs should be a combination of aims and approaches; therefore, a multi-dimensional language curriculum should be considered. Such multi-dimensional language curriculums are divided into four parts, which are linguistic, cultural, communicative, and general language education. Bilingual programs should also bring linguistic and cultural knowledge together so that learners of a language appreciate both the language and the cultures in which English is primarily used to communicate (Fortune & Teddick, 2003; Met, 1993; Myers-Scotton, 2010). There is consequently a need to introduce learners to cultures of certain English speaking countries. Weisman et al (2007) envisioned an ideal image of a bilingual-bicultural environment in which cultural aspects are integrated in topics of the lessons, and McKay (2003) suggested providing topics and scenarios of both English speaking countries and local contexts for a better cross-cultural understanding.

Due to MOET's direction of making English the medium of instruction and the suggestion of upgrading to an immersion program (Hamers & Blanc, 2000; MOET, 2008), the content of the program should also focus on teaching Natural Science and Social Science subjects. In that way, learners will be well-prepared to use English in their academic life.

Teaching Strategies and Approaches

Taking the idea of initially familiarizing learners with English and improving their English skills, a structural approach can be applied to provide learners with the understanding of language systems and rules (Baker, 1993; Hamers & Blanc, 2000). However, grammatical accuracy and fluency are not the only elements that language learners aim to achieve. Instead, effective communicative competence should receive higher consideration. For this reason, Baker (1993) provided a functional approach which refers to the development of language for real-life activities. Baker (1993) recommended task-based materials with diversified real-life topics employed in the context of group-work or pair-work. However, the functional approach is still heavily teacher-focused. Therefore, this approach along with the structural one is suitable for the first stage of the program to get learners used to using English in various situations, understanding teachers' directions, and achieving accuracy in their language use. In addition, Baker (1993) proposed the interactional approach, which offers a learner-centered focus and increases learners' activeness in communication. According to this approach, teachers are facilitators and learners themselves and work together to carry out communicative tasks. Learners are expected to find suitable strategies to communicate with others in completing the tasks, and teachers give feedback and correction when needed. This approach requires both considerable language ability and cooperative skills; therefore, this approach is more appropriate for the second stage of the program.

The Role of Teachers

According to Cohen and Swain (1976), teachers of immersion programs should be bilingual with a strong fluency in the L2. Gándara et al (2005) maintained that teachers of effective English language programs should possess the ability to communicate with students, engage students and other social agents in the program, possess knowledge of all aspects of language and teaching methods, and have efficacy in teaching. Weisman et al (2007) suggested that teachers in bilingual programs should be bilingual-bicultural teachers because "the cultural knowledge and life experiences of bilingual-bicultural teachers can facilitate their ability to establish this type of learning environment" (p.195). Thus, qualified teachers and teacher training programs are essential parts contributing to the success of the program. Teachers working in this learning environment should beware of culture assimilation or disregarding the culture of their students. Teachers' knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds is important in this type of program and should be exploited for the benefits of learners. Teachers have to recognize the benefits of their students' cultural and linguistic strengths and backgrounds to help students develop not only their linguistic competence but also their ability to engage with other societies with different norms (Weisman et al, 2007). Dubetz and De Jong (2011) viewed the classroom as an image of a society. However, the scope and features of a society may be too broad to bring into an isolated

classroom. Therefore, teachers should build up a context beyond the classroom for the students. Dubetz and De Jong (2011) aimed at collaboration not only among teachers in an institution but also other agencies in the community.

From what has been discussed, bilingual education consists of the use of two languages with a gradual shift to the target language. In this case, the shift should be made from Vietnamese to English. Also, the program should be upgraded from a bilingual program to an immersion program in which learners are taught entirely in English to prepare them for higher studies in English-only environments. Bilingual education should integrate instruction of language and culture so that learners are able to cope with exposure to English speaking countries and communication with international interlocutors. Vietnamese learners, under MOET's directions, should be then taught natural and social sciences in English. The teachers would ideally be bilingual-bicultural so that the teaching of English and associated cultural aspects will be most effective.

Research Questions

Given the goals of education in Vietnam and the characteristics and requirements for bilingual education reviewed above, this paper aims to understand issues in the current implementation of bilingual education in Vietnam by asking the following questions:

1. How is bilingual education actually implemented in a private institution in Vietnam?
2. What are some successes and challenges, from the viewpoints of the teachers?

The aim of this research is to find out whether bilingual education at early learning stages is effective enough for learners to move to a higher level of education with English as the dominant language.

Methodology

Context

I selected a private institution in a southern province in Vietnam which labeled itself as an international school teaching students from elementary to high school levels. The private institution has two educational programs, and all students need to attend both.

The first and main one follows the core education program of MOET in which learners take courses in the natural and social sciences. All of these subjects are taught in Vietnamese using the textbooks issued by MOET. In this program, English is taught by Vietnamese teachers who are trained to be EFL teachers. Those teachers also use the textbooks assigned by MOET to help learners gain basic knowledge of English and deal with the national exams.

The second program labeled as a bilingual program is designed to provide learners, depending on their levels, a rich English environment. Native English speakers are employed as teachers, and Vietnamese teaching assistants are occasionally provided upon the request of the English native teachers or students. Each unit in this program contains different sections, such as grammar, reading, writing, speaking, listening, and pronunciation. The school administrators believed that the learners need to improve their language proficiency, and there should be chances for them to be immersed in an English-only environment to help them get used to the language and be able to use it competently.

Classroom and Program Observations

I observed both programs to gain an in-depth and complete view of how education was undertaken in these programs, and whether the issues of bilingual education discussed in the literature were implemented. Starting with an observation form developed by the Massachusetts Department of Education (Appendix A), I further paid attention to the content of the program, language use, materials, teaching methods, including the roles of and interactions between teachers and learners, and assessment. The observation work was done in three weeks in 3 classes at 3 levels ranging from primary, secondary, to high school. The observed classes in the first program included general English, mathematics, and literature classes, while the second program only had English classes.

Interviews

I interviewed the teachers in charge of both programs to gain in-depth understanding of the programs and the successes and challenges they faced when they taught those programs. In accordance with the characteristics of bilingual education in the literature, I focused on the objectives of the programs and the teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness and limitations of the programs. The actual interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Analytical Procedure

I analyzed the data based on the principles of bilingual education reviewed above and focused on program content, language use, activities, and teaching strategies.

Findings and Discussions

Since there are two programs currently run at the institution, I will examine each program before pointing out the successes and challenges in implementing bilingual education at the institution. Hamers and Blanc (2000) and May (2008) required all educational programs to have achievable aims and goals. The international institution does aim to develop learners' English language proficiency through its use in an English-only environment. Following my observations and interviews, I noticed some mismatches in its intended goals and its actual implementation.

The core program

Content of the program

In the core program, learners were taught subjects required by the MOET for the national exams. Those subjects were mainly natural and social sciences. In addition, learners needed to take physical education as a requirement. The teaching and learning of those subjects strictly followed what had been assigned by the MOET. For example, the materials, curriculum, and test format were regulated by the MOET.

Language use

In the core program, Vietnamese was the medium of instruction, except for the English course, where both English and Vietnamese were used. However, depending on the students' levels, the teachers would use varied amounts of English in their instruction, as the advanced students are

able to comprehend more English instructions compared to the lower level learners. I noticed that the teachers preferred using Vietnamese to teach grammar and vocabulary; in several cases, instructions in Vietnamese would be much prioritized to help learners understand the lessons clearly and to save time. Only in speaking parts of the lessons was English the dominant language. Although this is a common situation in Vietnam (Kieu, 2010), the core program undoubtedly does not meet the principles of bilingual education, since English is not used in teaching, except in the English course, where some English was used. Therefore, it is not what researchers expect in a bilingual program (Findlay, 1998; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Warger & Dobbin, 2009).

Classroom activities and teaching strategies

The core program was frequently carried out in forms of lectures. Learners were given instructions and explanations before completing exercises in their textbooks. Even in English classes, the students were not provided with language tasks. They mostly worked on what Ellis (2009) called *instructional grammar exercises*, since learners needed to apply some suggested structures to complete both written and oral exercises. Baker (1993) required a task-based approach for bilingual programs to maximize learners' use of English to complete authentic tasks. Hence, the core program neither had a place for task-based learning nor followed the principles of a bilingual program.

The Bilingual Program

Content of the program

The bilingual program aims to develop learners' communicative competence in English. The prescribed textbooks for this program were "Everybody Up" (Oxford University Press), "American English File" (Oxford University Press), and "Face2Face" (Cambridge University Press), which mainly focused on the aspects of vocabulary, listening, speaking, and pronunciation for elementary, secondary, and high school levels respectively. At all levels, the students attended 5 periods per week in this program. This program placed emphasis on providing students with varied real-life situations and teaching them how to use English for interactions and communication in those settings. Cultural and behavioral aspects were also introduced in the program through storytelling, videos, and also through the scenarios designed by the instructors. For example, the instructors tended to integrate holidays as well as introduce some taboos in those cultures in their teaching. The content of the program follows what researchers on bilingual education suggested in providing a rich English environment with authentic learning topics for learners (Baker, 1993; Cummins, 2007; Fortune & Teddick, 2003; Jost, 2009; Kieu, 2010; Met, 1993; Myers-Scotton, 2010). The curriculum, materials, and assessment in this ESL program were designed by the institution without interferences of the MOET.

Language use

For an authentic bilingual program, Hamers and Blanc (2000) and Findlay (1998) required extensive use of the L2 to develop learners' L2 proficiency. In other words, this international institution should make English not only the language used in education but also the means of

communication in other situations among different interlocutors. The bilingual program at the institution partly meets this requirement, since English was widely used in the program as the only means of communication between the teachers and learners. However, it was observed that when the teachers were not there, the students had the tendency to use Vietnamese. Also, when students were out of that English-only zone, they used only Vietnamese to communicate with the school staff or even with their peers, except very simple and common expressions such as *good bye*, *see you*, *OK*, and *thank you*. The use of English was not required outside the bilingual classrooms. Besides, students at all levels had only 5 hours per week for this program. Due to this limited contact, English was not routinely used (Pang, 2012). Furthermore, except the bilingual program where English is used the most, there were no other programs where English was used as the medium of instructions for natural and social sciences. This matter is common in Vietnam since Vietnamese is still dominant in most cases unless English is strictly required (Nunan, 2003). Shifting to an English-only policy is not immediately and easily done due to a number of factors regarding the teachers' proficiency and the school policy (Ben Tre Department of Education, 2017). Therefore, the bilingual program at the institution seems to match principles of a transitional bilingual program, gradually shifting to the target language with a certain amount of Vietnamese used in the classrooms (Cummins, 2007; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Kieu, 2010; Swain & Johnson, 1997, cited in Tarone, 2005).

Classroom activities and teaching strategies

In contrast to the core program, the teachers in the bilingual program usually created many different real-life scenarios so that the students could use English to deal with different contexts. This is a very important feature in a bilingual program, since it helps develop students' language competency and communicative ability. In fact, the suggestion of task-based approach is justified by its merits in helping to develop students' use of the target language as a supportive condition for their target language development (Baker, 1993; Ellis, 2009). The bilingual program did achieve this goal, since task-based techniques were widely used. Some examples of the topics employed were shopping, going to the cinema, registering for a course, booking a hotel, ordering food, etc. Students were given numerous chances to use English through group-work, discussions, presentations, and role-plays. Depending on their levels, the difficulty of tasks and the support from the instructors were adjusted. Teaching activities were also varied depending on the topics and students' levels. Some examples of this included simple activities like discussions, presentations, and question cards to much more complex ones such as projects. To illustrate, for elementary students, the instructors gave abundant instructions so that students could do the tasks. Furthermore, the tasks were relatively simple. For instance, they included activities centered on requesting to go to the cinema, going shopping with parents, talking about family, etc. They involved short and simple questions such as "*What are you going to do tomorrow?*", "*What do you want to buy in this supermarket?*", "*Do you want to eat at KFC today?*", and "*What gifts do you want for your birthday?*". For more advanced students, the instructors provided less support, which means most of the work was managed and completed by the students at a higher level of difficulty. For example, the instructors mainly focused on problem-solving tasks such as complaining about a newly bought but broken phone, applying for a scholarship, and attending job interviews. To

illustrate, one of the tasks was building a theme park in their community, which required research, extensive discussions, and a considerable amount of time to complete.

Successes

The institution has achieved successes in implementing a bilingual program by familiarizing students with the use of English and improving their proficiency. The students were quite confident in using English to deal with different situations at different levels and highly aware of cultural and behavioral aspects through the activities. To illustrate, students successfully completed their projects and other in-class tasks and passed all exams. To do so, they needed many discussions and consultations with their instructors, and all of these were carried out entirely in English. Additionally, the institution organized numerous extracurricular activities to introduce the cultures of English speaking countries to the staff and students. Many students participated in presenting cultural aspects of those countries in comparison with Vietnamese culture in English. The topics of the presentations were those which had been introduced by their instructors, such as US and UK holidays, table manners, etc. They were also able to handle questions from the audience. Another specific illustration for intercultural awareness was the way they addressed the teachers. When talking to a Vietnamese teacher, they used “Mr” or “Ms” with the teachers’ given names. However, they comfortably called their English native teachers either by the first name or a title with the last name. They were able to use English in both formal and informal settings and have fruitful interactions with native speakers for meaningful communication. A common example of this were the numerous project presentations and reports that they completed in their class, which required more advanced academic language. Furthermore, there were opportunities for informal interaction when the students invited their instructors for lunch at the cafeteria. The researcher observed their use of English for the invitations and also their conversations at lunch time. The topics of the conversations ranged from classroom studies to daily-life topics such as new movies at the local cinema or discussions on weekend activities for their groups. Also, they once invited their English native instructor to the local floating market, and they had a long talk about that in class the following day. These learners were proficient enough in English to be tour guides and interpreters for their instructors. Since this is an international school, there had been numerous foreign visitors. The interviews with the staff revealed that on those occasions, the students would become guides to introduce school life, their studies, and their opinions to the visitors. Thus, referring to the definition of bilingualism discussed earlier, those students should be considered as bilinguals due to their ability to use English to communicate in different situations despite unequal fluency (Amankwa & Hammond, 2011; Hsui, 1996; Myers-Scotton, 2006; Richards, 1974). They also gained other skills through tasks such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and time management, since the bilingual program consists of numerous activities requiring those skills. The learner-centered approach was also applied to maximize learners’ autonomy.

Challenges

However, some challenges do exist when implementing bilingual education. Bilingual education should contain a movement from a bilingual program to an immersion program (Hamers &

Blanc, 2000). This is also in preparation for the implementation of English as the medium of instruction (MOET, 2008). From the findings, the institution does not reach the level of immersion due to this limited use of English outside classroom settings and its lack of English use when teaching other subjects. In fact, English is not widely used at the institution because of the staff's limited English proficiency. The staff, through interviews, stated that they were not proficient enough to use English in teaching and communicating with students outside classroom. Therefore, the aim to create an English-only environment as a supportive element of learners' language development is not completely achievable. Regarding MOET's proposal of using English in education, teachers' limited English proficiency also precludes the possibility of teaching in English at the institution at this point. Those who are qualified in their specialized knowledge have a shortage of English competency. Conversely, the native speakers and teachers of English at the institution are not able to teach other subjects due to their lack of specialized knowledge. This is in fact a common problem nationwide when implementing bilingual education (Ben Tre Department of Education, 2017). Therefore, the principle of making English the medium of instruction is feasible only when the teachers are qualified in both English competency and specialized knowledge.

Apart from the teachers' qualifications, an additional challenge involves the shortage of materials. If English is meant to be the medium of instruction, there is a need for appropriate teaching materials in English (Ben Tre Department of Education, 2017). The teachers admitted that there were no materials in English at basic level which would enable them to train themselves in using English for teaching.

In addition, MOET has issued textbooks written in Vietnamese, and their contents are what students need to acquire to deal with upcoming exams. The more secure way to ensure that students are well-prepared for exams is to strictly follow MOET's guidelines. Thus, the core program is completely taught in Vietnamese. This is the influence of the national curriculum and exams preventing a full-blooded bilingual program from emerging.

Practical Suggestions

The suggestions of bilingual educators at the studied institution as well as in similar situations elsewhere would include the development of teachers' English language skills, the provision of abundant teaching materials in English, and the specification of a clear and realistic institutional policy of bilingual education.

To truly meet the demands and principles of bilingual education, English should be used more extensively, which would match the goals of the institution categorized as an international school. There is also the need to improve teachers' English language proficiency to be able to use the language for academic and other activities. There should also be training programs for teachers of the natural and social sciences to improve their English proficiency in relation to their specialities. It is also suggested that college lecturers who are both proficient in English and qualified in their specialities be invited to teach those subjects in English (Ben Tre Department of Education, 2017; MOET, 2008).

Moreover, more materials were in need because the teachers would like to conduct self-study as a preparation for their future teaching. They emphasized that the materials should be in

English but at different levels so that they could choose those appropriate for them. Ben Tre Department of Education (2017) has also suggested the provision of teaching materials in implementing English as the medium of instruction. The Department even goes further to suggest MOET issue textbooks written in English for other subjects so that teachers will not face difficulties in choosing appropriate materials for their teaching.

The final recommendation is about the educational policy at the institutional level. Although all teachers at the observed institution agreed to shift from Vietnamese to English, it was highlighted by the teachers that the teaching of those subjects should not start with English right at the beginning. It may take time to make English the medium of instruction, so teachers and learners should be gradually familiarized with English (Pang, 2012). In fact, there should be a combination of English and Vietnamese with the majority of interactions taking place in Vietnamese first. Then, a gradual shift should take place where English is used more and more before becoming the only language of teaching and learning. Some teachers even gave detailed suggestions that elementary students should learn those subjects in both languages; when they moved to a higher level, the use of English would be dominant. English should be more widely used for activities and interactions in varied settings to allow learners to use English routinely, which is supportive of their language development as bilinguals (Pang, 2012). As the institution is established as an international one, English should be recommended and even required in communication among staff and students. This would create diverse settings and more opportunities for learners to practice using the target language.

Conclusion

This case study reveals that the bilingual program at the studied institution has been able to develop learners' language proficiency, communicative competence, and intercultural awareness. Learners are exposed to a quite rich English environment. However, there are challenges in implementing English as the medium of instruction and creating an English-only environment for learners who are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the use of English. This paper has described certain successes of a bilingual program with detailed descriptions of how that program is run, and it reveals obstacles in establishing bilingual education. Suggestions have also been made in terms of developing teachers' language proficiency, an appropriate provision of teaching materials, and wider use of English at the institution. All of these factors would greatly contribute to achieve the goal of this international school and follow the direction of MOET. Numerous factors have been pointed out in this study. However, the scope is quite limited with only one institution observed for a short amount of time. Further research should investigate a wider range of institutions and programs to point out how to implement bilingual education effectively to improve Vietnamese learners' English proficiency and to meet the demand of MOET in making English a medium of instruction.

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APPENDIX A OBSERVATION FORM



Classroom Observation Form

Please attach any worksheets, lesson plans, or other resources materials provided.

[School name]

[Site visit date]

Observer	
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Subject		Part of Class Observed	<input type="checkbox"/> Beginning <input type="checkbox"/> Middle <input type="checkbox"/> End	Observation Start Time	
Grade		Type of Class	<input type="checkbox"/> Gen Ed <input type="checkbox"/> SEI <input type="checkbox"/> Pull Out	Observation End Time	
Room #			<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	# of Students	
				# of Adults	

Mission and Key Design Elements
Do you see evidence of the mission and key design elements in the classroom? If so, what do you see? <input type="checkbox"/> [List elements]

Curriculum			
Lesson Objective			
Language Objective			
Instructional Task(s)			
Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Was a lesson plan provided?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> NA <input type="checkbox"/>	Are the objective and instructional task aligned to the lesson plan (if provided)?
Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Are the objective and instructional task grade-aligned, based on your professional experience or other method of verification?		

Instruction
What are the teacher(s) and students doing?

Diverse Learning Needs: <i>Instructional practices meet the academic needs of all students, including but not limited to students with disabilities and English language learners.</i>		
Expected Practices/Strategies	Describe observed supports for diverse learners.	Rating
<input type="checkbox"/> Instruction, materials, and assessments are adapted to support/challenge all learners. <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom staff and additional resources support diverse learning needs of students. <input type="checkbox"/> SEI practices are evident (as applicable)		Exceeds
Groupings: <input type="checkbox"/> Whole Class <input type="checkbox"/> Small Groups <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Independent Modalities: <input type="checkbox"/> Visual <input type="checkbox"/> Auditory <input type="checkbox"/> Kinesthetic <input type="checkbox"/> Technology Student Voice: <input type="checkbox"/> Rare <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent <input type="checkbox"/> Dominant		Meets
		Partially Meets
		Falls Far Below

<i>High Expectations: Instructional practices are aligned to the school's common understanding of high quality instruction. Instructional practices are based on high expectations for all students.</i>		
Expected Indicator/Practices	Describe the implementation of the observed common instructional practices.	Rating
<input type="checkbox"/> [List the school's common instructional practices aligned to the school's common understanding of high quality instruction.]		Exceeds Meets Partially Meets Falls Far Below
Expected Indicator/Practices	Describe observed instructional practices that reflect high expectations for students (if any).	Rating
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher communicates and enforces specific standards for student work and effort. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher models and reinforces ways that students can master challenging material. <input type="checkbox"/> Students seek and receive support when appropriate; take academic risks; and/or challenge themselves to learn. ¹		Exceeds Meets Partially Meets Falls Far Below
<i>Student Engagement: Instruction fosters student engagement.</i>		
Expected Indicator/Strategies	Describe observed instructional practices that are used to motivate and engage students (if any).	Rating
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses instructional practices that are likely to motivate and engage most students during the lesson. Percentage of students that appear to be on task and/or participating during most/all of the lesson. <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 25% <input type="checkbox"/> 25% to 50% <input type="checkbox"/> 51% to 75% <input type="checkbox"/> 75% to 100%		Exceeds Meets Partially Meets Falls Far Below
<i>Safe Learning Environment: Classroom environment is conducive to learning.</i>		
Expected Indicators/Practices	Please provide evidence that supports how the classroom is or is not conducive to learning.	Rating
<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom climate is characterized by respectful relationships, behaviors, tones, and discourse. <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom is well-organized. <input type="checkbox"/> Learning time is maximized for all students. <input type="checkbox"/> Learning environment is physically and emotionally safe. <input type="checkbox"/> Expected behavior system is used as appropriate. <input type="checkbox"/> [List elements of expected behavior system.]		Exceeds Meets Partially Meets Falls Far Below

Retrieved from Massachusetts Department of Education
www.doe.mass.edu/charter/guides/ClassroomObservationForm.pdf

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the goals and current programs at the institution?
2. What makes the institution different from other local public schools?
3. As an international education institution, how is English language taught and is it different from English teaching at other public schools?
4. Is it possible to teach other subjects in English? Why (not)?
5. What are the successes and challenges in the teaching and learning at the institution?
6. Are there any suggestions to help develop the quality of teaching and learning to meet the objectives of this international institution?

About the author:

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