

Title: A preliminary case study of school-based additive bilingual curricula
in Taiwan.

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Abstract

In response to the trend of bilingual literacy, Chang-Tai Junior High School created its own school-based immersion curricula in the past academic year. An instructional expert from a local university, the school principal, and four English teachers composed the research team in this study. In its first-year of implementation, there were routine and non-routine activities throughout the year. “English Day”, “Chinese Proverb Translation”, and “Teach-Your-Parent” were implemented on a weekly basis, whereas a dictionary-checking contest, a stage play contest, a singing contest, an essay declamation, a multi-step game, guest speaker’s talks, and a portfolio exhibition were held on a chronological basis.

After the first year, the research team conducted a student survey and also interviewed several English teachers. Several weaknesses were discovered, among them were an insufficient budget, work overload for English teachers, the dysfunction of English teachers committee, and an overoptimistic prediction of learner analysis.

In addition, positive responses from 456 students were found, such as having a positive response toward all kinds of immersion programs, and expecting various English-speaking activities in the future. With as high as a 78% approval rating regarding parents’ appreciation toward bilingual education, about 70% of the class mentors and 83% of the English teachers attentively participate in design and implementation of bilingual activities. Finally, several suggestions for further improvements of this experiment are provided.

- **Introduction**

According to research in the past three decades, fluent bilingualism has a positive correlation with the cognitive growth of children. It has been widely believed that knowing two languages and perspectives usually gives bilingual children a more diversified and flexible basis for cognition (Latham, 1998). In the year 2000, the American Education Secretary, Richard Riley, gave a speech on Latino education in Washington, saying, “It is high time we begin to treat language skills as the asset they are, particularly in this global economy. Anything that encourages a person to know more than one language is positive – and should be treated as such. ... Proficiency in English and one other language is something that we need to encourage among all young people.” Thus, it becomes obvious that bilingual curricula has been viewed as a top priority in American education. (Anonymous, 2000).

Actually, Taiwan school systems have a similar vision as well. The importance of bilingual education has been emphasized in the new wave of “nine-year serial curriculum”, which implemented English curricula in elementary schools beginning in 2001. In order to prepare prospective broad-minded citizens with portable capability, bilingual literacy has become one of the most significant concerns in Taiwanese society. In addition, in the current curriculum reform, the advocacy of ten fundamental capabilities and the development of school-based curriculum make it possible for each school to design and implement its own bilingual curricula in each locality.

Chang-Tai Junior High School, located in Chang-Hua City, in the center of Taiwan, was founded in 2001 with a strong commitment toward implementing its own school-based additive bilingual curricula, because it was highly demanded and expected from community parents. In addition, an initial survey of 13 classes of learners showed that their prior learning experience in English was diverse, with

12.3% of the students demonstrating English illiteracy and 22.8% of the students having more than 2 years of prior English learning experience. Obviously, it became a big challenge, both for teaching and learning. Therefore, it was decided that an action research project was necessary to study how to design and implement its own bilingual curricula to meet their needs.

- **Purpose of inquiry**

Theoretically speaking, according to Dopke, McNamara, and Quinn (1991), there are two kinds of bilingual programs, in terms of additive and subtractive bilinguals. Additive bilingual programs simultaneously develop first and second language proficiency to a great extent, whereas subtractive programs discontinue first language development. In addition, Diaz (1985) found that additive bilingual programs directly influence cognitive and academic development of learners (p. 77). However, how to design an additive bilingual program is largely unknown in Taiwan.

Moreover, after 50 years of unified curriculum by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, it was the first time for each elementary and junior high school to face its own challenges in terms of creating a school-based curriculum. As a newly founded school, nobody knew how to start from scratch. Therefore, an instructional expert from a local university, the school principal, and four English teachers were recruited in an action research project on a voluntary basis. The purpose of this research was to study the following questions:

1. How can we design an additive bilingual program?
2. What kind of problems would be encountered?
3. How can we establish a workable mechanism to solve problems in implementation?

- **Methodology**

As a participatory action research, the research team held several meetings throughout the year to collect qualitative data. A questionnaire was administered to 456 students at the end of spring semester in order to gather further quantitative analysis from their feedback. Finally, some English teachers were randomly selected for an in-depth interview.

- **Visions of additive bilingual curricula**

Ever since this school was founded, through many discussions involving the school principal, the administrative staff, English teachers, and class mentors a decision was made to implement a bilingual curricula. Before students graduate from this school, it is determined that:

1. 70% of graduates will be able to pass the English screening tests administered by a national non-profit organization, and
2. oral communication capability is a must for student to talk to foreigners.

- **Preparations**

In addition to the abovementioned vision, there were several kinds of preparation:

1. Preparing a bilingual campus:

According to a current research finding in the United States (Park, 2002), it was concluded that ethnic group students usually learn better in a visual environment. In order for students to have more opportunities to have contact with English, all the signs on bulletin boards, trees, toilets, and so many other items were labeled bilingually. In such a well-designed campus, it was intended that students could learn English in an enriched way. This is a so-called “hidden” bilingual curricula.

2. Preparing English teachers:

As initiators and the responsible people involved in the project, teachers created and implemented a bilingual curricula. A professional course committee was established for English teachers to brainstorm and share ideas in order to gain professional growth. Though English teachers had a heavy teaching load and were also involved in class management, they were willing to meet on an irregular basis. In their meetings, topics ranged from initiation of any bilingual activity to evaluation issues. Through such a mechanism, the morale of the implementation of bilingual curricula was maintained in a satisfactory manner.

3. Preparing the local community and parents:

Before recruiting students for a new academic year, school brochures describing the bilingual program were distributed in town meetings. Several visits to local elementary schools were made. It is believed that if bilingualism is supported by the children's families and their school communities a positive developmental influence is guaranteed (D'Acierno's, 1990).

● **Routine Programs**

According to the regular syllabus ordained by the English course committee, there were four class sections each week. In addition to classroom teaching, several bilingual activities were implemented on a weekly basis:

1. English Speaking Day:

It was assumed that students who graduated from local elementary schools had been learning English for at least one year. Thus, it was optimistically predicted that they should be able to speak survival English to some extent if they were given a chance to practice. Therefore, a 30-minute practice session was administered every Wednesday morning. Each week an English teacher was in charge of leading a variety of activities, including current news, fairy tales, festivals, and so forth. During this

30-minute period, all students and teachers were encouraged to speak English.

Unfortunately, this program was cancelled after one month, partly because the majority of students were insufficiently equipped with survival English, and partly because administrators and teachers were too shy to speak.

2. A Chinese proverb a week:

Every Friday morning, each English teacher took turns to translate a Chinese proverb into English. These translations were written down on a poster and taught in a pep rally. Then, they recited it together in each class. In addition, students were required to copy these proverb translations in their pocket-size notebooks in order for their parents to double check them.

3. Teach-Your-Parent:

In order to involve parents in checking on the progress of their child, students were encouraged to teach their parents what was recorded in their pocket-size notebook every week. After sharing, their parents could sign the notebook. Apparently, interaction within a given family was improved to a great extent, and thus this program was highly appreciated by most parents.

● **Non-routine Programs**

The English teacher course committee also designed several exciting programs, which are described chronologically as follows.

1. Check-Your-Dictionary contest:

At the beginning of the fall semester, all students participated in a contest. In this contest, a 50-question test was administered and students were encouraged to check their dictionary as quickly as possible. The aim of this contest was to have students use their dictionary in an expedient manner.

2. Stage play contest:

It was held during winter vacation. It took English teachers and their students about one month to prepare and rehearse. Each class was allowed 3-5 minutes to act. In this contest a foreign Catholic priest and 10 native English speakers from the local community were invited to evaluate the students' performance.

3. Singing contest:

It was also held during winter vacation. It took English teachers and their students about one month to rehearse. Each class was supposed to sing one English song in the contest.

4. Multi-step game:

During the spring semester, six native English speakers from a local cram school were invited to set up ten stations of challenges. About 200 students who were expected to enroll in this junior high school in the next academic year participated. Since these participants had learned English for at least one year in elementary schools, they could answer questions and play games with their limited English proficiency and also have fun.

5. Declamation contest:

Each class had a representative who was given a copy of 5 short articles and was randomly assigned an article for him or her to declaim for 5 minutes. Evaluation of their performance was based on their pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and showmanship.

6. Guest speakers:

Each semester the English course committee invited a native English speaker from a missionary church to give an informal speech in the morning rally. A lot of open-ended questions, gestures, and body movements were embedded in the speech. By firsthand contact with native English speakers, students felt excited and appreciated the practical value of learning English. Immediately after the morning

rally, a follow-up discussion was held in each English class.

7. Portfolio exhibition:

It was called the gallery of bilingual learning. Students and English teachers who had portfolios were encouraged to exhibit their masterpieces on a voluntary basis. All of the students could browse through those portfolios as they wished and were led to have a thorough discussion and appreciation of this exhibition in their English classes.

8. Bilingual publication:

In order to advertise the bilingual programs to the community, a school brochure was published in a bilingual format. In a professional manner, this brochure contained the abovementioned information.

● **Result**

Data from the questionnaire and interviews revealed several findings:

1. Students had a positive response toward all aspects of the immersion program. For example, 374 out of 456 students (82.01%) felt “English Speaking Day” was not too difficult, 343 out of 456 students (75.21%) felt “A Chinese Proverb A Week” easy or moderate, and 446 out of 456 students (97.80%) liked or at least felt fair about the weekly “Teach-Your-Parent” activity.
2. In addition to the current additive immersion programs, students tended to expect more English-oriented programs, such as watching English-speaking TV programs, recruiting native English speakers as teaching assistants, establishing an English club, initiating various English contests, an English-speaking summer camp or winter camp, an English book fair, and so on. Seemingly, after implementing one year of additive English program, their motivations in learning English were stimulated and maintained in an acceptable manner.

3. By advertising English immersion programs throughout the year, in the eyes of students, 78% of parents appreciated the bilingual programs, and 70% of class mentors and 83% of the English teachers attentively participated in these bilingual immersion programs.
4. The official budget was insufficient. There were cases of English speakers coming to assist for free. It was obvious that there should have been some kind of budget for propagating these immersion programs. Fortunately there were some donations from the community and parents made later in the year, and thus this problem was minimized.
5. All English teachers felt that they were overloaded with work. They needed to take a good care of 35 students in each class and teach at least 20 hours per week, while also fulfilling some types of administrative jobs within their tight schedule. Thus, they only had a small amount of time to do this action research.
6. The English course committee played a crucial role in creating and implementing these additive bilingual immersion programs. However, all committee members felt that this committee could have functioned better if they could have met on a weekly basis.
7. Since students' prior experience in learning English ranged from "no experience" to "more than 2 years", a remedial solution to meet their needs was missing. Although these additive immersion programs could not do much in taking care of this gap, most students still kept a positive attitude toward English-speaking activities. However, it was strongly expected that homogeneous instruction should be implemented in the near future.
8. Though bilingual signs and environment were supposed to play an important role as "hidden curricula", their impact toward students was not as high as expected. According to the comments of English teachers who were interviewed, those

bilingual signs and environment would not work appropriately unless they were included in regular instruction or various contests.

● **Conclusion**

Therefore, in our opinion we judge the program to be moderately successful because it provided a variety of creative activities which brought fun to students and established an English course committee as the mechanism to solve various problems. However, if the school could provide the teachers with more time to meet on a weekly basis, and if the bilingual education budget could be increased, then we believe the program could truly be a success.

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