

Challenges faced by English education in ethical minority areas under the background of Bilingual Education Policy for ethical minority students: Taking Yunnan Province as an example

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Abstract. With the promulgation of the national bilingual education policy, the vast majority of ethnic minorities have learned to master both Mandarin Chinese and ethnic minority languages, providing them with more opportunities for their development, but it does not emphasize their foreign language skills to go out into the world. Therefore, the research theme of this paper is the challenges of English language education in ethnic minority areas in the context of bilingual education, taking Yunnan Province as an example. The study finds that there are three main challenges facing English language education for ethnic minorities. They are language teaching issues in ethical minority areas, English teacher issues in ethical minority areas, and people's attitudes toward English learning in ethical minority areas. Firstly, there are a lot of problems with English teachers, such as the impact of minority languages on Han English teachers is big, insufficient teacher resources, low professional quality, and high turnover. Then, the students learn English with language transfer and are not interested in it. Finally, schools, teachers, parents, and students do not value English education enough.

Keywords: English Education; Ethical Minority Areas; Bilingual Education; Challenges.

1. Introduction

There are 56 ethnic groups in China, but the official language is Mandarin, and most ethnic minorities use their languages. To solve the problems of ethnic minorities' development, cultural preservation, and educational development, a bilingual education policy (Mandarin and ethnic languages) has been proposed. However, with the promotion of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, economic exchanges between China and other countries have become increasingly closer, and the demand for English professionals is increasing. Especially in some remote minority areas, to seize this opportunity and achieve economic development, it is necessary to focus on English education.

English education in minority areas faces many challenges due to its unique language environment and other factors. A Previous study has also explored this question, and it found that there were three main reasons, "teaching", "learning" and "environmental platform" [1]. However, do English-speaking Han Chinese teachers who cannot familiarize themselves with minority languages affect students' English learning? Does language migration affect the spoken English of students in minority areas? Do schools, parents, and teachers in ethnic minority areas pay more attention to English education? Are students in ethnic minority areas interested and motivated to learn English? Exploring these questions is very meaningful to study the challenges of English education in ethnic minority areas. However, in the absence of fieldwork and interviews, the results obtained may not be generalizable and there are some biases. Secondly, some of the data cited in the study were sampled, and the results may be accidental. Finally, the cited literature does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by English education in ethnic minority areas. This paper analyzes the challenges faced by ethnic minority areas in learning English under the ethnic-Chinese bilingual education policy from three perspectives: language issues, teacher issues, and people's ideological issues, and gives suggestions.

2. Language Teaching Issues in Ethnic Minority Areas

2.1. The Impact of Minority Languages on Han English Teachers

Most of the teachers engaged in secondary English education in ethnic minority areas are Han Chinese, and these teachers know less about the languages of the ethnic minority areas [2]. If teachers and students can not communicate and interact with each other in a timely and effective manner, teachers will not be able to understand students' mastery in time and then adjust their teaching. At the same time, students maintain their mistakes and cannot correct them because they do not receive timely feedback from the teacher. On the other hand, Han Chinese teachers, who do not understand the pronunciation characteristics of minority languages, find it difficult to find the most suitable method for minority students to learn English pronunciation, so the teaching efficiency is not high. At the same time, it is also difficult for Han teachers to truly integrate into the regional culture because they know little about minority cultures, resulting in a lack of cultural bonds with students, which may lead to poor teaching quality and efficiency. Therefore, to improve the English language level in ethnic minority areas, it is necessary to strengthen the language training of Han Chinese teachers who teach English.

2.2. Language Transfer Difficulties for Minority Students

According to a survey on the English phonological learning of ethnic minorities in Yunnan, it is found that the English phonology of ethnic minority students is indeed affected by their mother tongue dialects to a certain extent, and some ethnic minority students can distinguish the unique pronunciation of each phoneme of the English language very well, and think that dialect learning is helpful for English learning, but some students are interfered by their dialectal accent, and find it difficult to recognize some confusing phonemes [3]. It can be seen that the process of learning English pronunciation by ethnic minority students is influenced by the unique phonetic features of their mother tongue (dialect), in other words, the phenomenon of language transfer occurs in this process. From the above survey, it can be known that some native language pronunciation features will facilitate ethnic minority students to learn English pronunciation, while some native language pronunciation features will lead to students' substandard English pronunciation. In other words, when language transfer occurs, the impact on students' learning of spoken English is mixed. Therefore, teachers should find the similarities between native dialects and English in the teaching process to promote positive transfer, and also find the differences between the two to inhibit negative transfer as much as possible. At the same time, teachers should also use multimedia, music, movies, and other innovative means of teaching, to stimulate students' interest in learning English.

2.3. Attitudes toward learning English among ethnic minority students

On the one hand, ethnic minority students are not interested in English and think that English classes are boring, with a lot of words, sentences, and articles to memorize, and the pressure of homework is relatively high [4]. On the other hand, based on interviews with secondary school students in Yunnan, it was found that many secondary school students lacked motivation to learn English, and some of them dropped out of school and had poor academic performance [5]. One of the interviewees, a Naxi middle school student from Lijiang City, Yunnan Province, said that since he would not go abroad in the future, it was useless to learn English [5]. From this, we can see that there is a problem with the attitude of ethnic minority students towards English learning, neither attach importance to English, nor are they interested in English learning, and lack motivation. If students don't like English from the bottom of their hearts, it will be difficult for them to get good grades, even if their teachers teach them well and control them. Therefore, schools and teachers need to understand the real reasons for students' lack of motivation and find strategies and measures to motivate students to learn English. At the same time, the problem that students are not interested in English, teachers can create more interesting English games in the classroom, such as the English version of the Wolfman Kill, etc.,

and set up game prizes, to stimulate students' interest in English and improve students' participation in the classroom.

3. English Teacher Issues in Ethical Minority Areas

3.1. Insufficient Resources for English Teachers

Most rural elementary schools do not have an English teacher, and some centralized primary schools have only one English teacher, in some schools, English teachers are replaced by teachers of other subjects, and any teacher who knows the ABC alphabet can be assigned to English classes [5]. It can be seen that there is a serious shortage of English teachers on the faculty in ethnic minority areas. Another paper also found that the construction of high school English teachers in aquarium areas needed to be strengthened, the age structure was unreasonable, and there was a clear polarization trend [6]. Therefore, national and local governments should strengthen their investment in funding English language education.

3.2. Low Professional Quality in English Teachers

The results of the study found that the number of language teachers in the border areas of Yunnan Province who were 46 years old and above was 123, accounting for 20.4% of the total number of teachers, moreover, in elementary school, the educational level of teachers was mainly concentrated in college and bachelor's degree, each accounting for 40.8% and 57.07%, and at the middle school level, teachers with bachelor's degrees were the main group of language teachers, accounting for 93.38% of the total [7]. From the above, it can be known that English teachers in ethnic minority areas are not competent enough, not only facing the hidden danger of aging but also the English teachers' education is not high enough. It is also difficult to teach high-achieving students if a teacher is not at a high enough level. Some teachers are non-teacher-training graduates who have not received scientific and cultural knowledge in teacher-related specialties, such as psychology, nor have they been trained in teacher-related competencies, so naturally, the quality of English education is not good. To solve this problem, first of all, local governments should enact preferential treatment policies for outstanding English teachers so that these outstanding teachers will be willing to stay. Then, in response to the overall low quality of English teachers and the worrying quality of teaching, a survey recommended that teachers' subject matter literacy, teaching, and research skills be improved by hiring nationally recognized English language experts and educators to hold online lectures through distance learning methods [5]. Therefore, depending on their financial conditions, schools can train English teachers regularly, and they can also provide students with quality English-related online classes and self-study websites.

3.3. High Turnover among English Teachers

In the end, high turnover among English teachers. Yunnan's terrain is dominated by plateaus and mountains. The altitude is high, the terrain is complex, and many areas have high mountains and deep valleys, making transportation very inconvenient, so it is relatively poor. Against this background, many English teachers are reluctant to teach for long periods, leading to high teacher turnover. English teachers in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Yunnan Province are facing a similar situation. Studies have shown that the reasons for high turnover in the teaching force are mainly inadequate salaries, poor teaching environments, and fear that prolonged teaching in rural areas will be detrimental to professional and self-development [8]. It is known that the poor teaching environment, low salaries, lack of transportation, and concerns about their development have led to high mobility in the teaching force. To this end, local governments should seek to retain good English teachers by improving the teaching environment, raising teachers' salaries, and providing them with professional development opportunities.

4. People's Attitudes Toward English Learning in Ethnic Minority Areas

4.1. The Importance Parents Attach to Their Children's English Learning

The study found that parents' involvement in their children's English language learning in ethnic minority areas was low and that parents were relatively more involved in home monitoring than in home-school communication, parent-child communication, joint activities, and academic counseling [9]. Another study also pointed out that family factors are one of the factors influencing learners' attitudes towards learning [10]. From the above two studies, it can be found that parents' expectations and emphasis on their children's English learning affect their children's English learning performance. Moreover, compared with developed areas, parents in ethnic minority areas do not pay enough attention to their children's English learning, and their participation in their children's English learning is low. This may be related to the low level of parental education in ethnic minority areas. Therefore, parents should change their attitudes and expectations toward their children's English learning and actively participate in their children's English learning process. Secondly, some scholars advocate that parents should be involved in the education of their children in a concerted manner, to complement each other and jointly promote the physical and mental development of their children [11].

4.2. The Importance Teachers Attach to Their Students' English Learning

Yunnan is a mountainous region where most people are poor, which also leads to people not having the financial means to learn English and not being able to realize the importance of English learning. These may lead to English teacher burnout. One study on teachers' job burnout gave this answer: teacher job burnout a teacher's sense of fatigue and teachers' enthusiasm to decrease in their work, and they take a negative attitude towards students colleagues as well as teaching, and they are not satisfied with their work achievements [12]. Therefore, the states should increase the salary of English teachers in ethnic minority areas to reduce their burden and provide a material basis for solving the problem of teacher burnout. At the same time, schools and society should raise the social status of English teachers and make ethnic minority areas aware of the importance of learning English as a way of emphasizing the importance of English teachers and providing a spiritual basis for solving the problem. Finally, English teachers themselves should realize the importance of their teaching and can do various things to maintain their passion and love for the profession.

4.3. The Importance Schools Attach to English Education Courses

Surveys and interviews show that there are almost no English classes in rural elementary schools in remote areas of Yunnan, and in most township elementary schools, English classes are more like a decoration and seem to be dispensable, with English classes listed on the schedule, but in fact language or math classes are taught by classroom teachers [6]. From this, we can know that one of the reasons for the poor quality of English education in ethnic minority areas in Yunnan Province is the lack of attention from schools. Schools do not realize the significance and importance of English learning for students, which has led to the emergence of many schools that do not offer English classes or have only one or two English classes a week, and English classes can be taken over by language and math classes at will. The result is that students in minority areas have poor English. Therefore, schools should increase their emphasis on English language learning. Firstly, schools could offer more English classes, four or five classes a week. Secondly, schools should focus on the evaluation of English classes and English teachers, which may reduce the occupation of English classes. Finally, schools should offer after-school English activities to stimulate students' interest in learning English through interesting activities.

5. Conclusion

The paper finds that there are three main challenges facing English language education for ethnic minorities. They are language teaching issues in ethnic minority areas, English teacher issues in ethnic minority areas, and people's attitudes toward English learning in ethnic minority areas.

Firstly, language teaching issues in ethnic minority areas. Han English teachers who cannot master minority languages have many bad effects on students' English learning. So it is necessary to strengthen the language training of Han Chinese teachers who teach English. Language migration affects the English accent of students in ethnic minority areas, and its effects are mixed. Therefore, teachers should find the similarities between native dialects and English in the teaching process to promote positive transfer, and also find the differences between the two to inhibit negative transfer as much as possible. Students in ethnic minority areas are not interested in English and lack motivation to learn. So, teachers can create more interesting English games in the classroom, such as the English version of the Wolfman Kill, etc., and set up game prizes, to stimulate students' interest in English and improve students' participation in the classroom.

Then, English teacher issues in ethnic minority areas. Due to insufficient resources of English teachers, national and local governments should strengthen their investment in funding English language education. For low-professional-quality English teachers, schools can train English teachers regularly, and they can also provide students with quality English-related online classes and self-study websites. For high turnover among English teachers, local governments should seek to retain good English teachers by improving the teaching environment, raising teachers' salaries, and providing them with professional development opportunities.

Finally, people's attitudes toward English learning in ethnic minority areas. A survey finds that the importance parents, teachers, and schools attach to children's English learning is not high enough. Parents, should change their attitudes and expectations towards their children's English learning and actively participate in their children's English learning process. For teachers, the states should increase the salary of English teachers in ethnic minority areas to reduce their burden and provide a material basis for solving the problem of teacher burnout. Schools, should offer more English classes, four or five classes a week, focus on the evaluation of English classes and English teachers, and offer after-school English activities to stimulate students' interest in learning English through interesting activities.

The main contribution of this paper is through language issues, teacher issues, and people's ideological issues in ethnic minority areas to survey the challenges faced by English education in ethnic minority areas. There are many studies on primary, middle, high school, and university English education in ethnic minority areas, but there are few studies on English education for preschool children, and it is hoped that more scholars will study the current situation and solutions of English for preschool children in ethnic minority areas in the future.

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