

Reflections on the Bilingual Teaching Mode of Economics for Junior Undergraduates

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Abstract: With the further development of economic globalization and the internationalization of higher education in our country, it has become a top priority to cultivate interdisciplinary economics talents with an international vision and cross-cultural communication ability. As an important way to achieve this goal, bilingual teaching of economics is particularly important in the early undergraduate stage, but it also faces many challenges. This paper aims to analyze the core objectives and existing difficulties of bilingual teaching of economics for junior undergraduates, constructing a bilingual teaching model with the core of “student-centered, hierarchical, and progressive, online and offline integration.” From the curriculum, teaching methods, resource construction, assessment, and other aspects of the specific implementation path, it is expected to provide useful references for improving the quality of bilingual teaching of economics and effectively cultivating internationalized introductory talents in economics.

Keywords: Economics teaching; Bilingual course; Junior undergraduate; Teaching mode; Cultivation of international talents

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1. Introduction

In the context of building a community of shared future for mankind and the construction of “new liberal arts,” China’s higher education has put forward higher requirements for the international competitiveness of talent training. As a discipline originated in the West and with a global universal discourse system, the internationalization of economics teaching is particularly urgent. Bilingual teaching, that is, using mother tongue and a foreign language (usually English) as a medium for the teaching of non-linguistic subjects, is an effective means of connecting international frontier knowledge and expanding students’ international vision ^[1].

The lower grades of undergraduate courses (usually referring to freshmen and sophomores) are the foundation period of students’ knowledge system of economics and the shaping period of their thinking mode. At this stage, the introduction of bilingual teaching will help students to become familiar with the English expressions of economic terms as soon as possible and come into contact with the original classical theories

and cases, for their follow-up reading of English literature, follow-up international academic trends, and even lay a solid foundation for future study ^[2]. However, there are many problems among the junior students, such as the lack of professional knowledge, the lack of English application ability (especially academic English), etc., traditional, simple and mechanical “textbook translation” or “terminology infusion” bilingual teaching can easily lead to students’ loss of interest in professional learning due to language barriers, get into the dilemma of “professional” and “language” lose-lose ^[3]. Therefore, it is of great theoretical significance and practical value to explore a bilingual teaching mode of economics that conforms to the cognitive law of low-grade students and can effectively balance the teaching of knowledge and the improvement of language ability.

2. Objectives and core challenges of bilingual economics teaching for junior undergraduates

2.1. Core teaching objectives

The goal of bilingual teaching of economics for junior undergraduates should be multidimensional, and its core lies in:

Knowledge objectives: to systematically grasp the basic principles, core concepts, and basic models of microeconomics and macroeconomics, and to build a complete knowledge framework of economics ^[4].

Language goal: to master the English expression of high-frequency professional vocabulary in economics, understand the academic content of English teaching, and use English for simple academic discussion and written expression.

Thinking and ability goal: to initially form the ability to analyze the real economic problems with the way of economic thinking (such as marginal analysis, equilibrium analysis, cost-benefit analysis), and have a certain degree of cross-cultural understanding and international communication skills.

2.2. Major challenges

The double threshold at the student level: the junior students are faced with the two thresholds of “major introduction” and “language adaptation.” Professional knowledge is abstract and difficult to understand, and the lack of English listening, reading, and vocabulary greatly increases the difficulty of understanding, which easily produces frustration and anxiety ^[5].

Teaching pressure at the teacher level: qualified teachers are the key. Teachers should not only have a good command of economics, but also be fluent in oral English and bilingual teaching skills. How to skillfully switch between Chinese and English and explain complex concepts is a big test for teachers.

Limitations of teaching resources and methods: the selection of teaching materials is limited, and often directly uses foreign classic original textbooks (such as Mankiw’s “Principles of Economics”). Although its content system and cases are good, it may not be completely in line with the cognitive background and national conditions of Chinese students ^[6]. Teaching effectiveness will be greatly reduced if the teaching methods are still based on teachers’ lectures and lack interaction and practice.

Singleness of the assessment method: the traditional assessment is mainly based on the final written examination, which focuses on the memory and calculation of knowledge points, and it is difficult to comprehensively evaluate the progress of students in language application ability, thinking process, and comprehensive analysis ability.

3. Construction of the “step-by-step and multi-interaction” bilingual teaching mode

In view of the above challenges, this paper proposes a bilingual teaching model of “step-by-step and multi-interaction”^[7]. Guided by the constructivist theory and the “output-driven hypothesis,” the model emphasizes the dynamic adjustment of the proportion of Chinese and English use and teaching strategies according to students’ language proficiency and cognitive stages, and through a wide range of interactive activities to drive learning.

3.1. Core framework of modalities

(1) Stratification: at the beginning of teaching, students are initially stratified by English proficiency tests (such as vocabulary tests and brief listening comprehension), not in classes, but in order for the teacher to have a clear idea of teaching strategies, provide differentiated guidance. The content itself is also layered:

Basic level (concepts and terms): all professional core concepts (e.g., Supply and Demand, Elasticity, GDP, Inflation) must be provided in both English and Chinese and be reinforced by multiple repetitions and multiple contexts (e.g., charts, examples)^[8].

Core layer (principles and models): present the derivation of the basic principles and models in English, accompanied by explanations, analogies, and deepening in Chinese to ensure that expertise is not obscured by language barriers.

Application layer (analysis and discussion): encourage students to use the knowledge of Chinese and English, analyze Chinese and foreign economic cases, carry out group discussion and display, and realize the internalization and output of knowledge.

(2) Gradualness: the ratio of Chinese and English should be adjusted dynamically with the advancement of the semester and the adaptability of students, following the gradual path of “Chinese auxiliary → Chinese and English parallel → English dominant.”

The first stage (adaptive stage, 1–4 weeks at the beginning of the semester): using the “Chinese-led, English infiltration” model. Courseware, blackboard to present the key terms and titles in English, the teacher to teach in Chinese, interspersed with simple English instructions and greetings^[9]. The key point is to eliminate students’ fear of difficulties and establish a Chinese-English bilingual database of professional terms.

The second stage (transitional stage, mid-term): using the “Chinese and English parallel, complement each other” model. The content of the courseware is mainly in English^[10]. The ratio of English to Chinese can be adjusted to 5:5 or 6:4. Explain the concepts and theories in English, analyze the difficulties, supplement the cultural background, and compare the cases in Chinese. Encourage students to answer simple questions in English.

The third stage (promotion stage, the end of the semester): using the “English-led, Chinese-supported” model. More than 70% of the students are taught in English. Focus on case studies, seminars, and group project presentations in English. Chinese is only used to solve the most complex problems and carry out summary sublimation.

3.2. Application of diversified interactive teaching methods

Case-based learning (case method): Select Chinese and foreign economic cases (e.g., the law of demand in China’s Singles’ Day Shopping Festival, monetary policy in the United States subprime mortgage crisis)^[11]. Guide the students to analyze and discuss in both Chinese and English, and make the abstract theory concrete and situational.

Problem-based learning (PBL): open-ended economic questions (e.g., “How much to charge for campus coffee shops?”) are presented to students in small groups, and finally, students submit reports or presentations in both languages.

Classroom experiments & simulations: using online platforms or simple games to simulate market transactions, auctions, etc. Instructions can be issued in English, with participation and an intuitive understanding of “Invisible hand,” “Game,” and other concepts, students’ learning interest and participation are very high.

Flipped classroom: put the knowledge transfer process before class. Students are required to watch assigned English instructional videos (e. g. Mru, Khan Academy) and read chapters from the textbook. Class time is devoted to in-depth discussions, questions, and exercises to make the most of the interactive English environment ^[12].

4. The support and guarantee system for the implementation of the teaching mode

4.1. Construction of three-dimensional teaching resources

Textbook selection: to help students overcome their reading difficulties, a foreign classic textbook is used as the core, and a Chinese guide, an explanation manual of core terms, and an exercise set are compiled.

Online resources: Building course websites or SPOC platforms, integrating rich multimedia resources such as English language instructional videos, selected readings from The Economist, TED Talks, data visualization, and more, to meet students’ individual and expanding learning needs.

Develop a series of bilingual teaching cases based on the practice of Chinese economic development, combining socialist market economy practice with Chinese characteristics with international economic theory, to enhance students’ cultural self-confidence and the ability to integrate theory with practice ^[13].

4.2. Formative assessment and evaluation system

To break the mode of “one test determines the whole world” and establish a multi-dimensional and process-oriented evaluation system:

Usual performance (30%): including classroom Q&A, online quiz, group discussion contribution (both in English and Chinese).

Project assignment (30%): such as a case study report, interpretation of economic data, presentation of a group research project (ability to use Chinese and English materials and bilingual expression is required).

Final examination (40%): the examination paper may be in both Chinese and English. The objective and calculation questions are mainly in English, focusing on the depth of their economic thinking rather than the rhetoric.

4.3. Improving the ranks of teachers

Strengthen the training and support for bilingual teachers. To organize teachers to participate in special training in foreign language teaching and bilingual teaching methods; to encourage teachers to visit and exchange overseas to improve their academic English; to establish a bilingual teaching and research team, prepare lessons collectively, and share resources; Discuss and solve the problems in teaching together ^[14].

5. Conclusion and prospects

Bilingual teaching of economics to junior undergraduates is a systems engineering that cannot be achieved

overnight. Neither mechanical piling of English nor complete reliance on Chinese translation is advisable. The core of the teaching model advocated in this paper is to follow the law of education and take students' cognitive development and acceptance ability as the starting point. Through scientific stage design, diversified teaching activities, and comprehensive resource guarantee, the depth and breadth of bilingual integration will be steadily promoted^[15].

The implementation of this model is expected to achieve mutual promotion and complementation between the acquisition of professional knowledge and the improvement of English application ability, and truly make bilingual teaching a catalyst to stimulate students' interest and cultivate their international competitiveness, not a burden. In the future, with the development of artificial intelligence technology, tools such as AI-assisted real-time translation and personalized language learning paths can be further integrated into this model to provide more powerful technical support for bilingual teaching of economics, and to improve the quality of teaching, so as to more effectively cultivate both rooted in China and can overlook the global economy of outstanding economists.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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